

LEAVES
FROM AN
ARGONAUT'S
NOTE-BOOK

T. E. JONES



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—and kneeling by the low chair looked up into his face. (See page 29.)

Leaves From an Argonaut's Note Book

A Collection of Holiday and other Stories
illustrative of the brighter side of
Mining Life in Pioneer
: : Days : :

By
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D e d i c a t i o n

To the Pioneer Miners of California and their
Sons and Daughters this book, which the
Author believes to represent the
brighter and better side of
mining life in early days,
is respectfully dedica-
ted by one who

"Crossed the Plains in '50"

PREFACE

In presenting this volume as a candidate for public favor, the Author will be brief in his prefatory remarks. Coming to this State with the tide of immigration which flocked in from every quarter in 1850, I made my home in the mines until after the century was ended, in fact my home was in one mining county for forty-nine years. Naturally, in such a long period of residence, I saw mining life in all its various phases.

I began writing for the *Golden Era* and other publications, stories of mining life at an early day, none of which, however, are published in this volume. One day the editor of the *Trinity Journal* (my home paper) asked me to write a story for him, and after some badinage I promised to do so. I was then mining with very poor success, and, it being a "dry" winter, I had lots of leisure time on my hands, so I wrote the story of the "Milk Pan." It was received with such general favor that thereafter, whenever a holiday of any sort was coming I would be importuned for another fitting story, and generally I complied. I have made a selection of what *I* think the best of what I have

written and herewith present them. Many of the incidents related are true in foundation, being known to have occurred either by myself, or by reliable personal friends, and around these incidents I have thrown the glamour of romance. To the generation of men and women who were raised to manhood and womanhood in the pioneer days of the mines, will be given an opportunity to recall from their own recollections some of the characters and incidents similar to such as are related herein.

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PART I

THE MILK PAN.

A STORY OF TWO HOLIDAYS.

The mining camp at which I wintered in the season of 1850-51, was located on the Middle Fork of a stream in the Middle Mines and was known on the express list as the town of Cedarville, while among its own denizens and those of the camps close adjoining, it was better known by an appellation which not even a desire to be graphic shall induce me to transcribe in these pages. Like most of the mining camps of the day, the buildings were built in the main of unhewn logs and were built solely with an eye to comfort. Scattered along either bank of the stream or on its tributary gulches, were the cabins of the miners to whom the little place was a sort of fountain-head from which they weekly received their supplies of meat, groceries, tools and other necessities of mining life. The mines in the vicinity were not among the richest of the many placer deposits of the State, yet they contained some first-rate claims, while in any favorable place, more than wages

could be realized by the common method of working in those days—with a rocker.

The principal building of the town and the one which would naturally attract the attention of a newcomer, was the hotel. Like the other buildings, it was built, also, of logs, and viewed from a distance, it had the appearance of three log cabins joined together. A closer glance showed that this was not the case, but the builders, probably not having force sufficient to handle logs the full length required, had sawn them into lengths of sixteen or twenty feet, which were then held in position by square blocks of wood let into notches of the logs, cut in on either side and end. The whole was covered by a long, flat roof of shakes. Inside, the rough walls were covered with a lining of cloth, and along each wall a triple row of bunks, placed above each other, furnished sleeping quarters for the numerous boarders and wayfarers whom the pursuit of fortune attracted to the town. A long, stationary table occupied the center of the room and at either end a huge fire place extended across the width of the building, in which the fires, like those of heathen theology, seemed never to die out. This rough looking structure was, if we were to judge by the little sign above the door, the "Miners' Home," and the sign further indicated that the proprietress thereof was a Mrs. Grayson.

In the four or five months' residence I had under this roof, I discovered that our worthy hostess was fair and forty, though not fat; that she had buried one husband, drove off another and was at this time on the lookout for a third one.

The boarders at the Miners' Home averaged about thirty in number, made up of miners whose claims were near the town and an occasional "sport" who dropped in to dig into the pockets of the aforesaid miners. A motley crowd we must have been; I can look back through the twenty years which have intervened and imagine I can see them all again. There was one chap (who shall be nameless) who was perpetually torturing the strings of a wheezy fiddle—another who was equally industrious in blowing melancholy wails from a cracked flute. Nearly every State in the Union was at times represented among us and the brogue of Ireland and accent of Germany were not often missing. We were on the best of terms with ourselves, our landlady and with each other, and in this happy state of mind the first month of winter had nearly passed away and Christmas eve was upon us.

Let none of my fair readers conjure up visions of a Christmas tree, a happy social gathering and a merry dance on *this* Christmas eve. No, the mines of twenty years ago and the mines of today were

as different as night is from day. There would have been willing hands to raise the Christmas tree and load its branches with rich and valuable presents, but the wives, the mothers and sisters and other loved ones to whom we might have given them were dwelling on the waters of another ocean. What would Christmas be to us?

And, sooth to say, if I were to judge the thoughts of others by my own, we were in no mood for merry-making. With many of us it would be the first anniversary of that joyous night passed away from the old home circle and memory was too busy with the past. The old home influences yet had a strong hold upon our hearts, we were too young in the country to find pleasure in the revelry of drunken men, or in that still greater bane of California life—the gaming table. How well I could remember the look of grateful pride with which mother had glanced around at us on the last Christmas, and the kiss of that little sister as she bid me to “be a good boy and not stay longer than a year.” And then there was—pshaw. They tell me she weighs TWO HUNDRED POUNDS and is the mother of eight children—children which *ought* to be mine.

But the hostess of the Miners’ Home had no idea of letting the occasion pass by unobserved, so the minute the last straggler had finished his sup-

per and the table was cleared away, Mc., the cook, appeared, bringing in a huge pannikin of egg-nog. There was no refusing a bumper to "many happy returns" when presented by the fair hands of Mrs. Grayson, herself, so we lined up alongside the long table and only waited for the ladling-out process to be completed to join in the toast. Just as Mc. was filling the landlady's own glass, a hurried step came to the door which opened and a miner entered. He was one of two who lived and mined on "Sucker Gulch," more than a mile distant—with his partner I had formed a slight acquaintance when they were in town on some of their trading visits. His forehead was wet with perspiration although the night was cold and his breathing was short and heavy, as though he had been hurrying.

"Just in time, Mr. Styles," said the widow, who appeared to know him. "We were about to drink to Christmas eve; here, take this glass and I will get another."

He shook his head and motioned back the proffered glass with his hand. "I have no time to drink, or talk," he said, when he had partly recovered breath. "Ike is pretty badly hurt, and I have come to have some of the boys go for the doctor."

"Hurt?" "How?" "When?" "Where?" These questions came in a quick succession as we crowded around the newcomer.

"By a blast; just at dark. There was a big boulder that lay across the gulch square in our way. We thought we could shatter it enough by one blast, so that it could be moved. Ike was tamping the charge when it went off, somehow, and knocked him over. I thought him dead, at the first, but he only seems to be badly bruised. I got him to the cabin, but I fear he will be blind."

A murmur of pity ran around the room, then a moment's silence. Mrs. Grayson was the first to speak.

"Well, one of you must go for the doctor. There's my pony in the stable for whoever wants him. Ride him fast as he'll go till you get to Ione, but let him take it easy coming back."

"I'll go," said a lank Hoosier, to whom we had given the name of "Scraggy." "I reckon I know that road pretty well, and will get over the ground about as fast as any of you."

"Thank you," said Styles. "Now, who of you will go up to the cabin with me?"

"I will." "And I." "And I," spoke a dozen voices at once. Quick as quiet was a little restored, I spoke to Styles.

"Choose any of us you may prefer, Mr. Styles. We are all willing to be of any assistance to you in this trouble, if we can."

"Well," he said, reflectively, "I guess *you* had better go with me. I've heard him speak of you once or twice, and you won't seem so much like a stranger to him. I guess you and I can take care of him tonight, and after the doctor has seen him we will know what's got to be done, and if we need any more help, we will call on these boys then. Now, if you please, we'll be off, for I had to leave him alone while I came down. There's no one working on the gulch but us two."

Alone, in his agony. There was, indeed, no time to be lost in returning. Perhaps, even now, in the delirium of pain, he might be trying to grope his way along the rocky path or be lost among the gulches. It took but a minute for me to throw some loose blankets over my shoulder and we started as rapidly as the darkness would permit, up the creek. It was but a rough trail by daylight, winding along the steep mountain side, and in the night it was anything but a pleasure trip. But, making the best time we could, inside of half an hour we reached the cabin on Sucker Gulch.

To our delight we found he had not left the house, but was lying in the bunk where his partner had laid him. He had been up, it seemed, and had

brought the water bucket to his bedside and had wet a towel and put it over his face to relieve the intense pain. He did not want anything, he said, in answer to our inquiries, but would we build a fire, it was cold and so very, very dark.

Styles and I had lighted a candle when we first went in. We looked at each other and each read the other's thoughts without a word.

I persuaded Styles, who was pretty well tired out to go to bed and let me keep watch until morning. So all through that long, dreary night I sat by the fireside, listening to the wandering fancies which were conjured up by his fevered brain, putting in a word of comfort and hope in the more lucid moments, and praying—oh, how earnest, that daylight and the doctor would come. Well, the longest night must have an end and at last it came—the cold, gray dawn of Christmas morning, but a sorrowful Christmas it was to poor Ike Marston.

There was never music sounded sweeter to my ears than did the sound of the clatter of horses' feet on the frozen ground, as soon after daylight the doctor and Scraggy came galloping up. The widow's pony had given out at Ione, but Scraggy had, somehow, impressed another into service so as to guide the doctor on the return trip. After a moment's conversation with me the doctor

went into the house and to Ike's bedside. Styles, aroused by the noise of their coming, turned out and stirring the fire into a cheerful blaze began preparations for breakfast. Scraggy and I sat down on a bench outside and conversed in low tones until the doctor came out, then looked inquiringly at him. He shook his head ominously.

"It's too soon to say with certainty, but I fear he will never see again. Who is to stay with him?"

I could not tell him that, thought the boys would take turns.

"It would be better for him if a couple of you would take the whole duty, it will not be for long. Better that than a change of nurses, I have found. Suppose you and his partner do it until I come again? I will leave the lotions and directions with you now."

I promised what he required and took the medicines he had brought along with him.

"I shall come up again day after tomorrow, if I can get away; there is considerable sickness about Ione, now; and it keeps me hustling. Follow the directions I have written down and it will be almost as good as if I stayed here myself. That coffee smells rather inviting and my night rides makes me feel wolfish."

We entered the cabin, where we found Styles had breakfast ready, to which we sat down. The

doctor and Scraggy then took their leave and, after having told Styles what the doctor had said to me and giving him the written directions, I went to bed. It was afternoon when I awoke, several of the boys from Cedarville were there, having come up to see how the sufferer was getting along and to offer their friendly offices. I told them what the arrangements were and after receiving a message for my partners not to expect me for some days, they left for home.

At night my vigil recommenced. I had given him some strong opiates, under the influence of which he had become more quiet. I was sitting, reading by the fire, when he started me with the question:

"What does the doctor think about it?"

It was asked so unexpectedly that I was at a loss what to say. He waited a moment then added:

"There's not much hope that I will have my sight again, is there?"

I felt it would be cruel to give him hopes which I felt could never be realized, so I answered, "I am afraid not."

"So I thought, and have thought from the first. It's always best to look square at things as they are. Where's Styles?"

"Sleeping."

"So I thought, for I have not heard him moving about for some time. Now, my friend, you must write a letter for me."

"Now?"

"Yes, now. You'll find pens and ink on the shelf above the fireplace. There's wafers and paper in my valise behind the pork barrel. I want it sent to Drytown tomorrow, to meet that express and catch the steamer."

I found the things where he had indicated and, drawing close to his bedside, prepared to write as he might dictate. It was some time before he spoke again, and when he did, his voice was tremulous and broken.

"Oh, God; this is the hardest of all; and yet it must be done. Write, if you please——" And taking the words as they fell from his lips, I wrote as follows:

Alice—Do not start on the journey we have spoken of. I am blind—hopelessly blind for life—from an accident while mining. I cannot ask you to share a life which must henceforth be a burden to myself and to all who may try to befriend me. Let what has passed between us be as nothing, and my earnest prayer will be that you may yet be happy with one who will love you and strive to be all to you that I would have been.

Farewell, Alice, dear Alice, forever.

ISAAC MARSTON.

I sealed the letter and directed it as he told me, to "Miss Alice Fenwick, Rome, New York."

I knew too well what was passing in his mind, so made no comment, though I could not but approve of what he had done. We remained for an hour or more in silence, ere he spoke again :

"It's pretty rough, Sandy, to have everything swept from me at one blow. The light has not gone out of my eyes, alone; there is a deeper darkness in my heart."

"You have done wisely and unselfishly, Ike," said I. "It would have been selfish and inconsiderate in you to have done otherwise, but why this haste? I think, if it had been my own case, I should have waited a while to see if there would not be at least a partial restoration of sight and be governed accordingly. But you, of course, are in a better position to judge."

"She was coming out to join me soon," was Ike's reply, "and if I gave myself time to think, I might cherish unfounded hopes until it would be too late to write to her. No, it's better as it is."

He turned his face from me and said no more. After that for many days he answered only in monosyllables when spoken to and at times I was fearful that Reason would be driven from her throne. But under the care of Doctor Sexton, who acted the part of the physician, and the friend as

well, he soon began to improve in general health, and by the time January was half gone, was able to go out and sit in the warm sunshine. And at last, one bright afternoon the widow's pony was brought up, he was placed upon her back and Styles and I took him down to the Home.

There he was a welcome guest and as there was always some one around who could be company for him and minister to his simple wants, we went back to our places in the mines again. Those of the boys who had cabins of their own would drop in to see him and often take him away for days at a time, to visit with them at their homes. And so the last month of winter was passing away, and the bright, warm sunshine and swelling buds betokened the coming of spring.

WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY.

If there was a day in the calendar which was looked forward to with greater expectation, and which in its coming was greeted with a greater reverence than any other, it was "Express Day." Once a week did that redoubtable day arrive, and sure as Friday came, the two grey horses, with the little covered wagon would drive up to the store, deposit its little load of treasures and then, on to its final destination, six miles distant. Our express, having sundry commissions to execute along

the route, was somewhat erratic in point of time, sometimes happening along right away after dinner and at others it would not put in an appearance until late in the afternoon.

On the particular Friday of which I am writing, our company was on the lookout for returns from some quartz which we had sent to Sacramento to be assayed, and consequently, the arrival of the express was looked for with unusual interest by us. So I had not gone with the boys to work, as usual, but waited to see the expressman in person and obtain all the particulars. We were sitting outside the store on some empty boxes, when the wagon appeared in sight, descending the hill, across a little ravine.

At the first glance we saw that the wagon contained a lady passenger. As this was something which had never before occurred, we were, of course, decidedly interested. Who was she? Where should she be going? It could not be a friend of Mrs. Grayson, for that lady had said nothing of expecting one. Perhaps she was going on to the Indian Diggings. Our speculations were only cut short when the wagon stopped in front of the store and the driver, after assisting his passenger to alight, pulled out a large traveling trunk and set it by the door. The trader had

already gone in with the letter bag and was busy sorting out those for our place, so he turned to me.

"Where is that man stopping who got blinded last winter? This lady is a friend of his."

"Marston went up to the 'Forty Niner's' yesterday," said I. "I believe he intends stopping with him a few days."

"Where does the gentleman you speak of live?" said the lady. I turned to the questioner as she spoke and saw that she was a fair-haired girl of, perhaps, twenty years, rather slight in figure and while she was not one who would be called beautiful, was yet possessed of that pleasant, womanly expression of countenance which is more attractive than mere physical beauty can ever be. "Is it far from here?" she added.

"Nearly a mile," I answered. "But, if you wish I can go up and have Marston come down."

"Thank you, no; but if you will direct me how to go I will go and find him, myself."

"That I cannot well do; the trail branches several times and even if you found the house, there might be no one at home. They are probably at work, now, and he may be in the claim with him. If you can wait a few minutes I will go with you."

She thanked me and nodded and hurriedly despatching my business with the expressman, we started. There was but little opportunity for con-

versation as she followed in my steps along the narrow, winding mountain path, so the journey was made in silence. We soon reached the little flat where there was a cluster of cabins, one of which belonged to the Forty Niner, and I judged by the blue smoke from the chimney that some one was inside. So, without further ado I stepped up to the door and knocked.

It was Ike's voice that bade me come in and I saw that at its tones my companion started and trembled. I pushed open the door and stepped inside. A ruddy fire of oak coals was glowing in the fireplace and he had drawn a little, rude, home-made rocking chair to the hearth and was sitting there, alone. Evidently he had moved the chair a little round at the sound of our approach, and sat with the poor, sightless eyes turned to the light of the open door. All this I took in at a glance.

"I have brought a lady to see you, Ike," said I.

"A lady," he exclaimed, wonderingly. "A lady to see me?"

"Oh, Isaac." It was my companion who spoke. He leaped from the chair as if electrified.

"My God," he exclaimed; "am I dreaming? Am I mad? Or is that Alice's voice?"

Pale and trembling, she had leaned against the rough post of the door for support. She spoke

again: "No, Isaac, you are not dreaming, for I am here."

"Oh-h-h Alice." There was a world of agony in those two words. "Alice, Alice; why have you come?"

Only a moment did she pause, as if to gather strength. Then she walked steadily and firmly to where he sat and kneeling by the low chair looked up into his face.

"To be to you all you would have been to me, if this misfortune had fallen on me as it has upon you. To be your companion, your comforter, your wife. Once you sought me from all the world and gave me the love of your heart. Now, though all the world may fall away from you, yet I will still be true."

I had managed to reach the door while she was saying this, and closing it behind me, left them to themselves. I don't know which was happiest, Ike, or myself, at this sudden lifting of the clouds which was to pour such a golden flood of sunshine into the darkness of his life. I really believe I was on the point of climbing into a scrub oak and giving a few yells to properly show my delight, when I saw the Forty Niner coming. So I went to meet him and briefly told him what had happened.

"Well, God bless her; she's a brave gal," said he, when I had concluded. "Pity all wimmen's naturs ain't cast in the same mould. If they were, I wouldn't be prowlin' round this thievin' country today. Reckon it's better, though, as it is. We learn to 'preciate a true woman when we see one."

"You speak as if you had had a rough experience with the sex."

"Sorter. I sot to one onct till I thought I had her, dead sure. Fust thing I knowed I was flopped for a feller that had less sense but more dollars than I. It sorter upsets a feller's idees about wimmen to be sarved in that way, and then it takes one like this yer one to get 'em in the right channel agin."

I did not feel at all inclined to combat his philosophy, so we walked on in silence.

"Well," said Goodman (that was his name), "I reckon they had better go down with you to the Home. I've got no place for the gal to bunk in, and nat'rally they'll want to be together as much as they can. Mother Grayson can rout that cub of her'n out into the big room among you fellers an' let the gal have his bed, 'till we can see what's to be done. I'd go down with you, but I've got a loaf sot to risin' an' must tend to that."

We entered the cabin where I presented the Forty-niner to Alice. They had already come to

the same conclusion we had and were only waiting for my return to start, as it was nearly sunset. With a few parting words to Goodman, who promised to be down in the evening, we started and reached the Home before dark. Mrs. Grayson had a small clapboard addition built on to the back part of the main building, where she and her son, a lad of twelve or fourteen, ate and slept by themselves. There was a little fireplace, two beds, a lounge and a rocking chair—oh, it was a cozy little place. I took Ike and Alice there, brought down the trunk from the store and left them in the care of Mrs. Grayson.

Of course, the arrival of Alice was the great subject of conversation at the long supper table. Ike and Alice ate in the widow's room, and at supper and afterwards, I had to tell all I knew about it over and over again. Rough voices joined in praising her unselfish devotion and many and fervent were the wishes that went up for their future welfare. After a while I left the crowd, and went into where they were. She had opened the trunk and was exhibiting some of its contents to the admiring eyes of Mrs. Grayson, while Ike sat in front of the little fire a perfect picture of contentment. I sat down by him and we entered into conversation when there was a tap at the door and the Forty-niner entered.

"Well, got here all right, I see," said he, rubbing his hands, cheerfully. "Evenin', Mrs. Grayson. No, thank you; I won't sit down jest now. I've come arter Sandy thar, to go to the miners' meetin.' "

"What's the meeting for?" inquired Ike. "Some trouble over claims?"

"No, no; no trouble. Something about working claims, I b'lieve. It's better to have things fixed up, you know, so there'll be no trouble. But what's that thing you've got in your lap?"

"This?" said Ike, raising it up. "Why, this is a milk-pan."

"So it is," said the Forty-niner, looking closer. "Whar did that thing come from?"

"I brought it," said Alice, taking the question to herself. "Isaac wrote me how the miners worked and how at night they washed their gold in a tin pan. I was washing that pan one day and I told mother I was going to bring it with me for Isaac to wash his gold in. When the letter came, telling of his misfortune it was half filled with papers of flower seeds and other trifles. So I just set it in the trunk and brought it along."

"Well, you'd better keep it as a sort of keepsake," said the Forty-niner, "it would never be much a'count as a minin' pan. Lord bless yer innocent heart, that rim would be more crookeder

ner a dog's hind leg afore he'd rattle out one pan of bedrock. Puts me in mind, though, of some of the things fellers would invent in Ameriky an' bring out here to work in the diggin's. Thar was one like a churn. Shovel in the dirt, then pour in water. Slosh it round an' the gold settles to the bottom. Pour off the mud an' thar's yer money. Haw, haw, haw."

Mr. Goodman was so immensely pleased at his recollections of the inventive geniuses, that he quite forgot about the miners' meeting. So I jogged his memory on that point and with a promise to be back soon, we started.

It did not take us long to get through with the business and bring us back again. The trunk was closed and put away and Mrs. Grayson and Jasper were in the big room among the boarders, while Ike and Alice sat side by side in front of the fire. Goodman and I took seats at either side.

"You must have lost no time in comin' arter you heard what had happened," said the Forty-niner, suddenly addressing Alice.

"The next day but one," she replied. "I thought there was no time to lose."

"True as preachin,'" said Goodman. "But you're a brave gal for all that. 'Tain't every one would a showed your grit."

"Perhaps not," she answered, quietly. "But would *you* have had me do otherwise?"

"Not by a d— d— d— by any means." I rather think Mr. Forty-niner came *pretty near* forgetting himself just then. In a moment he resumed: "That brings me to a question I want to ax you an' you must pardon me for axin' it, as I have a good reason. When are you-er-a goin' to be-er-a, married?"

"Is that all?" asked Alice, smiling. "Well, I don't mind telling you, though it's a great secret. If there is a clergyman in the place, I am ready now."

"Bully for you," roared the Forty-niner, apparently much relieved by her straight-forward answer. "The fact is, Miss Alice, I'll tell yer. I was Cheerman at the miners' meetin' tonight, and we got to talkin' of you an' Ike, here, an' what a true, brave gal you are. All the boys are friends of Ike an' of you, too, though you don't know them nor they you. So, they sorter deppertized me *as* the Cheerman, to ax you if you'd as lief have it come off in the big room, so's they can all be thar."

"You have been such good friends to Isaac in his trouble, that I can refuse you nothing. Is there a clergyman living here?"

"No, not right in town; thar's one livin' on Spanish Creek, over the divide. He's minin' now,

but I reckon that makes no difference. We can send Jasper for him in the mornin', tomorrer you know, will be Washin'ton's Birthday an' you couldn't pick a better day if you had the year to choose from."

"Let it be as you wish," said Alice. "Isaac, I know, will be willing, for we were talking of nearly the same thing when you came in."

"All right, then. I'll tell the boys to be on hand tomorrer evenin'." And leaving the couple to themselves, we joined the crowd in the big room. And when Ike joined us an hour later, many and fervent were the congratulations from his old mining friends.

* * * * *

"Well, I do wonder! If the Higgins boys have not gone to work this morning! I think if I had as good a claim as they have, I'd try and keep Washington's Birthday. And they're Americans, too. Some people want to get rich too fast."

Mrs. Grayson seemed so indignant at the lack of patriotism in the Higginses that I had to tell her that my own company was also going to work.

"You are, hey? And I declare if there ain't John Walton getting his pan. Why, it looks as if you were all going to work as usual."

"Guess you're about right, Mrs. Grayson; we've got a smart fit on."

"Oh, you have, hey? Tomorrow will be Sunday, and you can work then, if your smart fit lasts. Well, you miners are the queerest set," and our landlady bounced off to the kitchen to pour her sorrows into the sympathizing ears of the cook.

If the truth must be told, the fact was that our hostess, albeit a good, kind-hearted woman as ever lived, had a hankering fondness for the head of liberty, as portrayed upon the face of the "almighty dollar," and loved to see that emblem stacked up in her drawer. No doubt the good lady had made a mental calculation of the quantity of dust she would take in in exchange for "hot toddies," "port sangarees," cigars and other trifles which this unlooked for proceeding on the part of the miners in going to work, instead of "laying off" as expected, had upset entirely. Under the circumstances, I think our landlady was a very ill-used woman, in which opinion, I have no doubt my readers will agree with me.

But if Mrs. Grayson had reason to complain that there was no demand that day for drinkables, she had certainly no cause for complaint in regard to the eating department. For, at the long supper table (which was not set till a late hour), not only the regular boarders but all the miners in the neighborhood were present. They had evidently come in direct from their claims, as every company

brought the company gold pan, containing the day's work, with them. These pans were put up on the long shelf by the fireplace, and the boys proceeded to make ready for the coming occasion. Their preparations were not extensive nor did they take much time—a new blue or red shirt from the store and a fresh pair of overalls, or pants was the extent.

When the supper was all finished the long table was partly taken up and a smaller one brought in from the widow's room. On it were placed a couple of candles, the widow's Bible and, odd enough it looked there, too, Alice's *milk-pan*. And now they came; Ike and Alice, the widow and Mr. Styles. The clergyman was in waiting and, stepping forward, after a few remarks appropriate to the occasion, pronounced the words which made them husband and wife. As he retired, the Fortyniner rose and drawing his stool up to the little table, checked with a motion of his hand the applause which was beginning to be heard.

"Boys," said he, "it is now nearly nine o'clock, the time to which the miners' meetin' last night adjourned. As Cheerman of that meetin' I call you to order."

Then there was instant silence.

"I propose now, in this yer business we have in hand, that we begin down the creek an' foller the

lead up. So many as thinks that way say 'aye.' Tothor side, 'no.' "

A growl of "ayes" came from all parts of the room.

"Very good, that's settled. We're ready to hear from the boys on the Secret Ravine."

This was the company of our whilom friend, Scraggy. Without a word that worthy raised his long length from the bench on which he was reclining, selected the company pan from the array of pans on the shelf, held it over the fire a moment, shook it until the last particle of the gold was loosened, then stepping up to the little table poured its contents into the little milk pan.

"Very good," said the Forty-niner, peering in. "Them fellers what struck them diggin's were sensible in keepin' it to themselves. The Higgins Brothers."

The eldest of the brothers took their pan and, going through the same procedure, added its contents to the other. They had the name of having the best claim in the neighborhood.

"Better yet," said the Chairman. "You fellers have got two ounce diggin's onless you're saltin' 'em on yerselves. Grub Gulch."

This was my company. One of my partners took our pan and added its contents to the grow-

ing pile. The Forty-niner had his comment to make, of course.

"Powerful good grub you fellers can have if it pungles that a way. Tarheel Flat."

And so the call went on, until every company in the camp (including Goodman's own) had been called and each pan emptied into the little milk pan on the table. Alice sat and looked wonderingly on, but Mrs. Grayson (who had not been let into the secret for fear she would be tempted to give a hint), I think, mistrusted something from the moment we got her to get the pan from Alice.

When the last pan was emptied and the bottom of the little milk pan thickly covered with the shining, yellow dust, the Forty-niner arose, and taking it, advanced to where the newly-married pair were sitting. "This," said he, presenting the pan to Alice, "is a token of our respect and admiration of true womanly love and of the friendship we feel for your husband. The doctor has told some of us that latterly he has some hopes that your husband's sight may be partly restored if he is able to place himself under the care of some of them doctor chaps down at the Bay. We agreed last night to take a day which might have been spent in idleness, or p'r'aps wuss, and give what we made for the purpose of takin' our part of the burden on one of our number. What has happened to him in the

mines may happen to me, or to any of us, tomorrer. An' we have given our mite as he would have given his, if one of us had been in his place an' he in ours."

He spoke with a sort of rude eloquence which affected us all. Ike tried vainly to say something, and poor Alice! She put her handkerchief to her eyes and for the first time her fortitude seemed to desert her.

"We're a rough lot, us miners here in the mountains; an' p'r'aps it is jest as well not to look too close into our lives at all times. But in a case of this kind we know our duty to each other an' gen'rally we do it. An' if you run short, mind you, jest let us know, an' we'll send down another day's work, if we have to do it on the Fou'th of July."

A round of applause greeted his words. Alice arose and, taking the pan from Goodman's hands, said in a broken voice:

"We thank you, sir; and we thank the generous men who, with you, have done this kind act. We will not pain you by hesitating or refusing to accept that which you have so generously given. And whether by its aid or not we can succeed in bringing light to my husband's eyes, we shall none the less hold your thoughtful kindness in grateful memory."

Ike had got on his feet and was again trying to say something.

"Never mind, old feller," said the Forty-niner, "we all know what you want to say. Give us a shake of the hand, instead." And, grabbing his hand he gave it such a grip as a bear might have done, while the boys crowded around to offer their congratulations.

The contents of the pan when cleaned and weighed, amounted to over fifteen hundred dollars. The next Express bore Ike and Alice away to the Bay City and for years I heard nothing of them. Early in March, news reached us of the discovery of new mines on the Scott River of extraordinary richness—coarse chunks often found on the surface of the ground. The rush to the Scott River began, taking nearly all of us away, many of us leaving better claims than we ever after owned. Years later I saw one of the wiser miners who had stayed behind and from him learned that Ike had so far recovered his sight that he was able to walk about anywhere unaided and to do some light work, though he could not read. They had made one trip to the "Home," but those they hoped to see were scattered throughout the State and it was only with the widow Grayson and her son they could talk over the story of the MILK PAN.

THE NEW LEAF

"Take another nip, Jack, before you go."

It was "Poker Jim" who extended the invitation and his words were addressed to "Whisky Jack."

"I don't mind if I do, Jim," said Jack, as he staggered to the bar. "It's the last, though, for a year. I turn over a new leaf tomorrow. I don't want you fellers to ask me to drink again, after to-night. Tomorrow is the beginning of the New Year, and I am going to turn over a new leaf."

It was rather pleasant to hear Jack say that he was going to turn over a new leaf. For the leaf of the past year and the leaves of too, too many previous years were so blackened and blotted and smeared and blurred, that even the most hardened one could find no pleasure in turning over the pages. Hence, it was pleasant to know that Jack was going to turn over a new leaf—in other words, lead a different life from the one he had been leading. The worst of the matter was the fear that Jack would not stick to his good resolution but fall back into the old rut after a struggle which never lasted over a couple of weeks, and generally ended in that many days. "It's my last drink for a year,"

continued Jack, as he poured into the glass a goodly portion of the liquor, his fondness for which had given him his sobriquet of "Whisky Jack." "Yes," he continued, in maudlin tones, "I've done the worst tonight I ever—hic—did, an' I'm going to quit for a year."

"What have you done so bad tonight, Jack?" asked the bartender with a grin on his face.

"Done," repeated Jack. "Spent every cent on whisky an' poker, I had. That I've done many a time, but t-night's too tough. It was money Agnes made by washing, and the children panned out along the gulch. She gave it to me as I came away, to buy some little traps for the children for tomorrow, as they had nothing for Christmas, and now the last cent is gone."

"Is that a fact, Jack?" asked Poker Jim.

"Yes, it is a fact, and that's why I say this time's too tough." He fumbled in the breast pocket of his gray shirt and laid a rumpled paper on the bar. "There's a list of the things I was to get; I have not one of them."

"Won't you catch it, Jack, when you get home?"

"Catch it?" said Jack, with an effort at drunken dignity. "Catch it?" he repeated. "Ah, if I only did catch it! If I caught it a hundred times! If I caught it a thousand times, I would feel better over it than to be met with the patient look which greets

me every time I go wrong. I've read of the men who went crazy and who cut their throats to escape the nagging of a woman's tongue. But if I should catch it I'll feel a mighty sight better, for I would know it was deserved."

The company looked significantly at one another, and Shorty Black observed to the man next him, that "Jack wasn't so full but he knew how to talk sense."

"But that's neither here nor there," continued Jack, returning to the maudlin strain. "Not one of these things—hic—will I take with me. Let's see. Stockings for baby. Boots for Johnnie. Doll for Carrie. Four pounds of sugar. Pound of raisins for, for—I can't make it out. Who's it for, Tom?"

"Pudding, I guess," said the barkeeper, taking the paper from John's hand. "But there's no use, Jack, in crying over spilt milk. You're going to turn over a new leaf tomorrow, ain't he, Jim?"

"That's what he says," answered Poker Jim, "and d—— if I don't try and help him. Come, Jack, it's getting late and my way is the same as your'n, as far as the branch, you know. Sit down a few minutes and we'll go home."

"Yes; got all my money, and that's all you want of me," growled Jack. But he suffered himself to be led unresistingly to a chair where he soon fell

into a drowsy stupor, from which he was only awakened by Poker Jim, who told him it was time for them to go.

The keen December air which greeted them as they passed the threshold, did more to restore him to himself than his hour of sodden sleep had done. By the time they reached the "branch" and crossed it on the foot-log bridge, John had so far recovered his sobriety as to be left safely to make his way home alone, which he did. A short distance farther he came to a dilapidated gate, which he opened and passed through the little field to which the gate had afforded entrance, made his way toward the house in the back, from one of whose windows a dim light shone on the path he traveled. It was his own house, and reaching the door he opened it and entered at once.

The light was given by a single candle which sat upon the table of what, in their prosperous days had been their "best room." It was their best room yet, so far as that was concerned, but it had little of the appearance it bore when John and Agnes Chambers sat in it during the first two or three years of their wedded life. The piano had long since gone to satisfy the importunities of an unyielding creditor, other articles of furniture had been parted with, one by one, until there was but little left but the bare walls. But, fortunately,

John, in one of his more provident moments had declared a homestead upon the patch of fertile land upon which the house was situated, and this Agnes Chambers refused to let be sold. Gentle and willing in all things else, to that proposition she always turned a deaf ear.

She was sitting by the little table as he entered with an eager, expectant look upon her face, which gave place to one of bitter disappointment when she saw that he came empty-handed, and in such condition.

"You are late, John," she said, trying to speak cheerfully.

"Late, Agnes, and that ain't the worst of it. I've made a fool of myself tonight, again. But I am determined it shall happen no more."

"You have told me that often, John," said Agnes, sorrowfully. "And once I believed you."

Still patient under her load of trouble. Oh, husbands and wives! The happiness of married life comes from mutual concessions; from a perhaps constant restraint of the disposition to criticise. We are only human, and humanity is not free from faults. Let us remember that "A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up contentions." Yet it sometimes happens that patience is long, too long, suffering.

"And you don't believe me now, do you, Ag.?"

"I wish I could say I do, John. But——" and she laid her hand on his arm, "I still *hope*, John. I was to blame; I should have gone myself. I should not have placed you in the way of temptation."

Wise little woman, you spoke more wisely than perhaps you knew. Did you get your inspiration for those last words from the words of prayer you were taught to lisp in infancy. Our Savior said, "Lead us not into temptation," and the two lids of the Bible contain nothing more fraught with meaning. How many are there of those men who hold their heads high, rejoicing in the confidence the world holds in their integrity, who might have fallen, had they but been exposed to the temptations which beset their less fortunate fellow man. How many of the gentler sex, who turn with loathing and scorn from the sight of an erring sister, who pause to think that they were not exposed to the same temptation, and thank God's mercy for it.

The warmth of the room began by this time to counteract the previous good effect of the crisp outside air, and none could be quicker to detect its action than Agnes. Rising from her seat she took his arm and led him unresisting toward his bed. "We'll talk of this tomorrow, husband," was all she said,

and in a few moments Jack was oblivious to new leaves, temptations and all other mundane things.

When Jack awoke he lay for some time trying to recall what had happened the night before. Gradually it came to him—his start to “town,” as the little cluster of houses at “The Forks” was called, the game of poker and its results. He had but little remembrance of the vow he had registered, but was in just that repentant frame of mind to register one now. But, unfortunately, these good resolutions, when made while recovering from the evil consequences of a big spree, or while smarting under the losses just sustained at the gaming table, seldom amount to much. When all the bad consequences of the spree have passed away, the poor wretch thinks he can now take just one drink and stop, and if he thinks of his depleted purse since the last gambling scrape, it gradually develops into a desire to try the game once more and if he can get “even” then quit for good. And in either case it generally works him back into the old rut.

The house was so preternaturally still that Jack wondered. Generally, if Agnes was not stirring, some one of the five children was, but now all was silent. He raised up in bed and saw that his boots alone had been taken off before retiring but that was no unusual occurrence, and in fact, made the operation of dressing much easier.

Jack arose unsteadily, put on his boots and started to find out why no one was stirring at this late hour. His boots clanking on the bare floors as he went from room to room, was the only sound which fell upon his ear. From one room to another he went, but no sign of life greeted his vision. His wife and children were gone.

"She has left me!" moaned Jack, throwing himself into the last rocking chair left. "Left me and taken the children with her! I can't blame her, but I must have her back, and I'll do better. If I can only get to talk with her, I know she'll come. Now for a little breakfast and away I'll go."

The "little breakfast," however, was a thing more easily talked of than obtained. Not a scrap of food of any kind could be found in the house. The flour barrel had been scraped and shook until not even a dust remained and Jack put on his hat and started for the store at The Forks to get some hard bread and coffee.

The sound of voices fell upon his ears as he reached the foot-log at the Branch, and stepping aside a little from the path he saw Poker Jim and his partners repairing an old reservoir. He thought that perhaps he could get breakfast at their cabin, so he went to where they were working. But to his greeting of "Good morning," none of them paid any attention. Thinking he had not been

heard, he repeated it with no better success, indeed, they all seemed so oblivious of his presence that one who was using a handspike came near knocking him over with it while at work.

John walked moodily down to the store at The Forks, and entered. It looked very much the same as it had when he entered it the evening before, except that at that early hour of the day the idlers were few. The barkeeper of the night before was the storekeeper of today, for then, as in many places now, your country store could supply everything needed for the miner's daily use, and whisky was deemed an essential, both by the bottle and the glass. John stepped up to where he was standing, asked him to weigh him a few pounds of hard bread and give him some ground coffee besides. But to his surprise he got no answer.

"Hard bread, crackers, anything of that kind," said John, reaching over the counter to be nearer the storekeeper. But he got no answer again.

"Well, this is tough," said John to himself as he turned away. "They've got all my money, and last night they got all that Agnes and the boys earned, and now I am not worth even refusing. I wish old Smiley were keeping store here now." And John walked out of the door to find materials for breakfast in some other quarter.

The Smiley, whose presence John had so devoutly wished for, was an old gentleman who opened the first store at The Forks. It was a little log affair with a clapboard addition wherein the proprietor boarded himself. Smiley made lots of money in that log store, which kept all the essentials of mining life as well as its more pretentious after neighbors did. But with the diminution of profits caused by competition, Smiley sold out his stock and sought new fields. Report said he had been killed afterward by Indians in Arizona, but nothing authentic was heard.

Great, therefore, was John's astonishment when on stepping out of the door he saw Smiley's old store in apparently full blast. Empty boxes and barrels were ranged outside, where the old-time loungers were wont to congregate and swap lies about their "diggin's," the old grindstone, on which he had so often sharpened his axe was in its usual place, and even old "Sus" the pack mule, stood before the door with aparejo on, evidently being prepared for a trip up the canyon. He could scarcely believe his eyes, but greater still was his surprise, when, on crossing the street, who should he see but old Smiley himself.

"Why, Tom," he gasped, "who would have thought of seeing you here. I was just wishing you were back among us."

"And here I am," responded Tom, "now what can I do for you?"

"I want a little grub, and haven't a cent to pay for it."

"All right, Mr. Chambers, what do you wish? You were a very good customer of mine years ago, and the time has come now for me to remember it. We are now helping each other."

John (as we prefer to call him now) indicated his desires, and, in a few moments was on his way back with provisions enough to last him several days. After his rebuff by Poker Jim's crowd in the morning, he did not care to go near to them again, but soon after passing the path which turned off to their claim he heard the sound of a pick below the trail and wondered, who, besides himself was compelled to work New Year's Day, except upon a work of necessity, such as putting in the repairs to the reservoir was. His curiosity in that line was so great that he laid down his burden and went in the direction of the sound. If his wonder was excited when he saw Smiley's store in full blast at The Forks, it was tenfold more so when he saw who it was that was using the pick.

"Why, Job, can I believe my eyes? I thought you were buried six months ago."

Job grinned a ghastly grin. "That's what was done, Jack, you helped bury me then, as some of

the other fellows will help bury you tomorrow. Unless they conclude to chuck you into the ground today."

Jack could hardly keep his breath. "What are you talking of, Job. Men ain't buried until they're dead."

"That's what's the matter with you, Jack," answered Jake, with another ghastly grin. "I came by Poker Jim's cabin this morning and heard them talking. They said you died last night."

"Did Poker Jim's crowd talk to you?"

"Talk! They could neither see nor hear me, though I could both see and hear them."

Jack still looked unconvinced, so Job felt it his duty to enlighten him farther.

"I didn't believe in purgatory, Jack, when you and I played draw-poker together, but we're in it now, or something like it. We've got to stay here till we pay all the old grub bill we owed, that we could have paid if we hadn't drank so much whisky and played poker and seven-up."

"Then what's old Smiley doing here? He didn't play poker."

"That's the only redeeming feature in the whole business," said Job, with another grin. "Smiley got our money that we spent for poker and the like, and he's got to stay here till he makes it all up by honest trade. But be off with you; I don't

care about staying in this fix longer than I can help."

And Job turned away and began digging at the bank again.

John made his way homeward without further adventure. There he discussed a dinner of the provisions he brought from Smiley's store, and then, concluding that if he was dead (and he now believed himself to be), there was no use looking for Agnes and the babies now, he went to the place where he had done his last work. Then he reflected that if those diggings did not pay any better than they had done in life, it would take him an eternity to work out the delinquent grub bills, so shouldered his pick and shovel and started out to prospect.

Days were passed and no diggings. Once or twice he had seen and talked with Job, but that individual, having nearly completed his task, was too eagerly looking forward to the time when he should make a change from his present condition, to one better—or worse, as the case might be, and not disposed to be unduly sociable. How much longer John would have continued on in the peripatetic course which seemed to have no ending, we cannot imagine, if a lucky thought had not come to him. He remembered what Agnes had told him of the children "panning out" at some place, and as

they were gone from him forever, he resolved to find the place if he could. Peering along the creek bank under the garden fence he saw a spot where recently work had been done, and in a moment he was bailing out the prospect hole and looking eagerly for any colors which would show themselves as the water was lowered, in case the ground was good. And goodly was the sight that met his eyes. Small colors showed themselves throughout the depth of the bank of gravel, while in the corner toward the house, the receding waters had washed bare several inches of the end of a goodly specimen. Dropping his bucket he grabbed for it, but, alas, it slipped out of its place and sprung to the opposite side of the hole. He turned and reached for it again with no better success, for it slipped from under his hand as easily as a timid cat can and was back in its place again as before. He reached for it with both hands, lost his balance—and found himself out of bed and sprawling on the floor.

“Why, John, John,” exclaimed Agnes. “What in the world is the matter with you this morning? Here you’ve been thrashing around and throwing your arms about as if you were fighting somebody in your sleep. I hope to goodness you were not quarreling last night.”

John sat up on the floor and looked stupidly around him. "You here, Agnes," he said, the remembrance of his dream still upon him. "I thought you were gone."

"Gone, John; where would I go to. No, when I said 'so long as we both shall live,' I meant every word. But, come now, husband, and get your breakfast. George and Arthur have eaten theirs and gone off with their new knives to cut the willows off their claim."

Just then there was a clatter of boots on the uncarpeted floor, and little Johnnie appeared, full of the pride and dignity and making all the noise, a boy with his first pair of boots can make. John turned aghast. "I wonder if the whole dern thing is a dream," he thought, "or if I *am* dead, and that is the ghost of a pair of boots I see?" But he got up and followed Agnes into the kitchen.

"See my pretty doll, papa," cried the little girl. "See what nice curls."

"Who gave it to you?" asked John, for want of something else to say.

"We thought it Santa Claus, who forgot us Christmas, but Mamma told us you were Santa Claus. Thank you so much, papa."

John turned a bewildering look upon his wife. "I thought it was cruel in you John, to deceive me

so, but now I see you were too much in liquor to know what you were saying," she said, in response.

"This is all a riddle to me," cried John. "What was I cruel about?"

"Telling me you had spent all the money gambling again, and brought nothing home for that reason. And when Mr. Noble came and brought all the things, and told me you had forgotten them, and as he thought I would want them for today he had brought——

"Noble? What Jim Noble; Poker Jim? Do you tell me he came here last night?"

"He did and brought with him everything I sent for, and some walnuts for the children, besides, in this basket. And I declare, here is the list I gave you; and the bill and two dollars change out of the dust. And here's a note for you, John."

John took the note and walked to the window for better light to read it. It was short, but to the point:

Keep your good intention, Chambers. We'll all help you.

JAMES NOBLE.

"They're better men than I am, Agnes, if they are gamblers. I told the truth. I had spent every cent and they have given it back to you, in the shape of what you sent me for. Now hear me, Agnes. I've now quit gambling not for a month, nor a

year, but *forever*. And no liquor ever passes my lips again until I know that I am my own master.

She looked into his eyes, and a moment after, with her head pillowed on his bosom, she said, between her joyous sobs: "I believe you again, John."

This all happened many years ago, and in the light of after years we can truthfully say that John kept his word religiously. For a time he had a struggle both with temptation and poverty, but he stood up bravely against both. It pleases us to add, that one day after thinking of his dream he went down to the place where the boys had been panning and his practiced eye told him that the little fellows had unwittingly stumbled on the lost lead of Bear Gulch and that it probably ran right under his house. Agnes had refused to part with the homestead, but when she saw the use the money would be put to, she raised no objections to its being washed away. With the proceeds realized they soon wiped out the delinquent grub bills (which, thanks to Agnes' prudence were not heavy), which had been such a bugbear to John ever since his famous dream, and in time got a better home in a part of the country where John's shortcomings were unknown.

John and Agnes are now a comfortable old couple, though as usual, the children have grown

and gone out into the world to build up homes for themselves. They are all good children, though I think George would have gone into a bad way if his father had not told him how things were going or at home once before he turned the new leaf.

THE THANKSGIVING DINNER

The winter of 1850-51 had been a dry one. Not that there was then the need of great ditches and reservoirs as now, but the experience of the year previous had led the miners to expect that the flood-gates of heaven would again be opened, and they made their preparations accordingly. Not much water was required to wash the dirt shoveled into a "long tom," and still less when the more primitive rocker was used. But the expectations of the miners has been wrought up to the belief that when winter fairly set in, the streams to which they resorted for summer diggings would be kept swollen by the floods of winter and that they must change base for the little ravines of the mountains. The "Forty-niners" were all going to do so, and the new-comers thought they could not go amiss if they followed the example set by such high authority. Therefore when the frosty nights and gathering clouds began to foretell the approach of the "rainy season," there was a general breakup of the summer camps to prepare for winter diggings.

The amount of preparation deemed necessary for weathering the winter through was very limited. Pine logs for the cabin were to be had for the cutting, red mud to "chink" the interstices was under our feet, and the branching sugar pines furnished "shakes" readily to the hand even of the unskilled "river." But the winter for which preparation was made and whose advent was so longingly desired, did not come. December, January and February passed, but the sun rode in a cloudless sky, or the few clouds which occasionally gathered and threatened refused to part with their moisture. On each little ravine where gold had been found by prospecting, piles of dry dirt, thrown up by the toilers, awaited the rainfall before its golden treasures could be set free. But it was not until winter had fairly passed and March appeared that storms great enough to start the gulches came. By which time thousands of the waiting miners had left the "dry diggings" in disgust, leaving their piles of rich earth to be washed up by whoever chose. We have had dry winters since, but none have been so complete a failure as that of 1850-51.

The miners scattered in search of other gold-fields, some to one part and some to others. Scott River drew men from the far southern counties with its stories of fabulous riches. Gold Bluff and other distant localities led others away—for it was

a peculiarity of the honest miner of the early day that a report concerning rich, new diggings was entitled to credence just in proportion to its distance away. The idea of changing places of abode and going only a few miles was a thing not to be tolerated. However, we were not so badly affected as were our neighbors, as we had claims which held us for awhile. But our time came, too, in its due season. Reports came of the discovery of a new camp, where both gold and water were plenty. It had been found by the Indians, who had already panned out great sums. There was only one bad feature about the story, which was that this new placer was situated at only twenty miles distance. However, we could go there in one day and back the next, so we borrowed a couple of *caballos* and away we went.

We found the picture had been a little overdrawn in reference to the abundance of water, but it was otherwise substantially correct. Scores of Indians were there with knives, scrapers and pans digging the soft bedrock in the shallow gulches, and each with from an ounce to a pound of gold-dust tied up in little rags. We gave the place the name of Indian Diggings, and if we mistake not it retains that cognomen till this day. There was only the water from springs to wash with and the springs were rapidly failing; but such mines would pay to hold

on to. It is needless for me to add that the new camp was quickly populated by miners, some of whom came from points hundreds of miles away, and that all the available ground was taken up. The Indians were summarily driven off; then, as now, an Indian had no rights which one of the Caucasian race felt bound to respect. It was done without any trouble; perhaps if the water in the springs had not been failing so rapidly, it might not have been accomplished without some bloodshed.

As nothing much could be done during the summer months, we divided our party; some remaining to look out for the claims, while the others went down to the Consumnes River to turn the bed of that stream and put in the summer. I was one of those who stayed at the Indian Diggings. Before dividing our forces, we rolled up the logs of a cabin, which it was to be a part of my business to finish up and get in readiness for the next winter. We built it on a little flat close to one of the live springs, amidst a grove of tall, slender spruce whose boughs locked and interlaced far above. We knew that we would have to watch the claims or we would have trouble when the season for mining arrived, for the fame of Indian Diggings had spread abroad, and the arrival and departure of bands of prospecting miners was a thing of daily occurrence; and although but little of real work could be done,

others were making similar preparations. Brought together from so many different quarters, those who had secured claims and were holding them knew little of each other as yet, but with that spirit of frankness so general among the toilers of that early day, we were soon upon terms of acquaintance with most of those around us. Water to work with there was none, but every company was doing more or less prospecting, and from the occasional pans of dirt brought to the spring or taken to the little creek and washed, we felt assured that our camp would be a good one when the winter rains should fairly set in. Among the arrivals which succeeded ours was one which, after a time, excited my curiosity. He was a young man, as indeed were the majority of those present, but though he watched keenly the various prospecting companies and seemed desirous of knowing what their success was, he made no effort to obtain a claim for himself. This surprised us the more, as from some words he dropped while at our camp, we knew that he had been in the mines in '49, done well in them and made a visit to the East. We were choke-full of enthusiasm then and could not understand how a man who had made money mining and knew how to mine would ever want to do anything else. We finally concluded him to be a gambler, waiting only until the boys

got "flush," to ply his vocation—in which wise we were mistaken.

Armfield, for such was his name, remained at the camp for a week or ten days, then went away as unexpectedly as he came. I thought that was the last we would see of him, but was mistaken again. He was gone a week or so when, coming home from the claim one evening, the sight of a new white tent greeted me. When I had cooked and eaten supper the proprietor of the tent came over and it proved to be Armfield. He had been to Sacramento in the meanwhile, after some tools, he told me. He said that he had come to the conclusion that Indian Diggings would be a pretty lively camp for some years, and he thought of building a boarding house. Would I care if it were built near us. I put his mind at ease on that point and we separated.

Armfield was up with the sun and showed that he was no laggard as far as work was concerned. There were plenty of sugar pines close at hand, and, with the assistance of a couple of idle miners, it was not long before the establishment began to assume shape. In the meantime a great intimacy had grown up between Armfield and myself, brought about by a sort of clannish feeling much more common in the early days of the mines than now. We found that we came from the same State to this,

and that of itself was a passport to each other's friendship. To meet a man from one's own State, though it might be from its most distant corner as compared to our own home, seemed like meeting a neighbor. Armfield and I were from near the same locality; we knew some of the same people, and nothing more was needed.

The new house rapidly approached completion, and our little cabin was overshadowed by its comparatively huge dimensions. As the finishing touches were being put to it, I noticed that Armfield had one of the rooms fitted up with extra care, and that in the last load from Sacramento were carpets and other things that did not go to the ordinary make-up of a miner's boarding house. I rallied Armfield on his odd notion (as I supposed) and asked him if he expected to have lady boarders, that he was taking so much pains.

"Not boarders exactly," said Armfield. "I'd have told you before, but thought to take you by surprise. That's to be my wife's room."

"Your wife!" said I; "you never mentioned that you were married."

"No more I ain't," retorted Armfield, "but that's no sign I won't be. The fact is, my girl is on her way here now; I sent for her to come before I made up my mind to build, and I expect they are coming down the Humboldt now. I at first thought I'd

mine, but it's better to have a steady place to stop in, so I built this boarding house. They left the Missouri River two months ago, and if they have fair luck they will be here in a week or two."

"Does she know where to find you?"

"Oh, yes; I looked out for that. Bill Simpson went out to the 'Sink' to buy stock—there's money in that speculation—and he'll tell them right where I am."

"Are her folks coming, too?"

"No, none of 'em. One of the neighbors is moving out with his wife, and she thought she would rather come that way than over the Isthmus. Our Western folks, you know, are a little scary about salt water."

The idea of settling down for life in California was a novel one to me then, as much so as one would now be of going anywhere else. But it was none of my kettle of fish, though I couldn't help wondering how a woman would like to rough it the way one would have to. I had thus far seen but one woman in the mines.

The hot days of summer were nearly gone when the new hotel was completed and ready for business. It was not the only business house in the Diggings; a store, a saloon and another hotel were under way before many days. Though no one was yet at work, money was plenty and business was thriving, for

most of the claim owners had either gold-dust on hand or could easily obtain enough for all necessary expenses. So when Armfield invited the boys in to help "open the house," there was a goodly attendance of the red-shirted gentry, and the bar, (that most essential adjunct of every place where business of any kind was transacted) met with most liberal patronage. Scattered among the throng were a few fresh from "the States," the advance guard of the immigration that was pouring over the plains, while the fact that there was to be a sort of "house warming" had drawn together pretty much all the idlers in the camp. I was assisting Armfield on the occasion and dispensing the fluids with a liberal hand while the crowd, not to be outdone in liberality, was putting them down as fast as we put them up.

There was a break-up of the assemblage toward midnight, except of those gathered around the monte-banks, for those institutions were sure of patronage whether the mines were worked or not. I was about to go home, when a stranger came to where I was standing, and, pointing to Armfield, asked:

"How long has he been here?"

"Who, Armfield?" said I; "Oh! it's between two and three months."

"Armfield?" repeated the stranger; "is that what you call him?"

"That's his name," said I.

"Well, maybe it is, but he looks enough like Bill Shively (Missouri Bill, we used to call him in Colusa) to pass for his brother."

"This is not your man," said I. "I knew this man's folks by reputation back in Illinois."

"Wall, p'raps I'm mistaken, but don't think it. Lemme have a little whisky."

I passed the desired liquid to him and soon after went away. It was late when I came around next day and I found Armfield in the best of spirits.

"She'll be here in less than a week, Joe," was his greeting. "They've got to Ragtown and will stop a day or two to let the animals rest a little. That desert, you know, is rough on stock. Bill Simpson saw her and told her just what road to take to get here. Stood the trip splendid, you bet. Won't I be fixed, though?"

I gave him my congratulations as a matter of course.

"I'm thinking, though, to go over and meet 'em at Hangtown. There's no preacher, or squire, or anything of that kind to splice us. Will you run the concern until I get back?"

"Why, of course I will."

"I thought you would, and I'll take 'em by surprise. Let's see. They're about Red Lake tonight and tomorrow they'll cross the Sierras. Give 'em three days more to reach Johnson's Ranch. If I start from here Monday morning I'll catch them there, so be ready for Monday."

The time would no doubt have passed slowly to Armfield had he not found so much to do to fix up that room. There was no end to the ways in which he arranged the furniture and pictures, and when I thought he could not find anything more to do, back he would be, working as busy as a nailer. But it was arranged at last even to his satisfaction.

Sunday morning I was on hand to take charge of affairs while my friend made his preparation for the journey. It was only twenty or twenty-five miles through the mountains to the immigrant road, but the country was innocent of anything except pack trails, unless the traveler took the wagon road towards Sacramento until it joined the great thoroughfare used by the incoming immigration. Sunday in the mines is always a busy day, and in the state of society then it was much more so than at the present time. All days were pretty much alike to the delver in the mountains, and if the Sabbath was observed at all it was only by the few who had not left the faith and traditions of the old homestead behind them with the homestead

itself. The operations of the miner alone were suspended, all other branches of business seemed to go ahead with greater energy than during the days of labor. In truth Sunday was the day of the week for the saloons, the hotels and the gambling houses. As it was in other places, so it was in the goodly mining town of Indian Diggings.

Toward evening, when the lengthening shadows of the pines cast a grateful coolness over the parched earth, a couple of horsemen rode slowly down the hill and approached the camp. They were well mounted, and as they reined up in front of Armfield's door there was nothing in their appearance to attract unusual observation. To the inquiries of one as to the chance for lodging and a place for their horses, I told them they need go no further, and taking the tired animals to a shed which had been hastily erected for such uses, I gave them a liberal supply of barley and went back to the house.

The strangers soon made themselves at home, and engaged in conversation with some of the miners. They said nothing to either of us in regard to the business on which they had come, nor as to their destination. Armfield retired early, as he wished to take an early start and reach Hangtown by noon. I noticed that the two newcomers

kept close watch of all his movements, but thought nothing of it at the time.

"Your partner leaves the night work to you I see," said the elder of them, soon after Armfield retired.

"He is not my partner," I answered, "I am only taking his place for a day or two, while he is away. He starts for Hangtown in the morning."

The strangers exchanged glances. "Why, that is where we were going, and as he no doubt knows the trail well, we had better go with him."

"You may have to ride faster than you care to," said I. "Where there is a woman in the case a man is not apt to let his horse nibble much grass by the roadside."

"So there's a woman in the case, eh?"

"I believe so; coming over the plains, and he'll meet her there."

My communication seemed to have a great effect on the stranger. He walked uneasily up and down the room and wound up by having a whispered consultation with the man who came with him. He came to me again.

"We may go over and may not; wake us up anyway in time to go with him."

I promised to do so and soon after the games stopped and the house was closed. When Armfield arose he woke me up and I told him the request of

the strangers. He went to where they had slept and found them already stirring.

The cook had prepared an early breakfast, to which Armfield and the strangers sat down while I got the horses ready. They finished the meal and rising from the table came to where I was and asked for their bill. I told them the amount which the one who seemed to be spokesman handed to me and then turned to Armfield.

"I'm sorry to interrupt your plans, my friend, but you can't go to Placerville today."

"Why not?" said Armfield, flashing.

"Because I have a bench warrant for your arrest from Yuba County. You're wanted up there to answer to an indictment."

"But," said I, speaking for the first time, for the whole thing was so unexpected, that I hardly knew what was being done. "Why not go with him to Hangtown and have him held to answer? You are not obliged, are you, to appear at Marysville at once, if I understand the matter."

"The offense is not bailable," said the officer, significantly.

Armfield turned pale as death. "Am I to understand that I am charged with murder?" he asked.

"That's what the indictment says: For the murder of John Fielding, committed in the County of Yuba, in December, 1849."

Armfield sprang up joyfully. "I was more than one hundred miles away from Yuba at the time. I never before heard of the man Fielding that I know of, and know no more about it than a child."

"Prove that, and you're all right; but you will have to show it to a jury, and not to me. All I know is that I have a warrant for Bill Shively, alias Charles Armfield, and shall execute it by taking you to the Yuba jail. We've had track of you two or three times, but lost it again. If you ain't the man I hope you'll get clear, and if you are, you'll have to swing for it. Now, if you've got any business to fix up here do it at once and we will be off."

There was no such thing as fooling with an officer of the law and nothing remained to be done except to do as he directed. It was evident to Armfield and myself that he was being taken for some other person, and would probably have to suffer some annoyance before he could prove who he really was. He could not escape the trip to Marysville; that was certain. At that place he hoped that the witnesses would see that the officers had got on the wrong track and he would, of course, be at once set at liberty. So, after giving me detailed instructions as to his business affairs and a confidential message to her who had taken the long and toilsome journey across the continent to share his fortunes, the three went away together.

The news of Armfield's mishap spread through the camp and excited considerable sensation. The majority thought with me that he had been taken for some one else, but there is always a class in every community disposed to believe evil rather than good of their fellows. But for the girl, there was but one feeling, that of sorrow at the news which would greet her upon her advent in the golden land. So, when some four or five days after their departure the white cover of an immigrant's wagon was seen winding down the hill and approaching the town, curiosity was on tiptoe to see the newcomers, and what effect the tidings would have on them. I hastened up the road to meet them as soon as their approach was made known to me, but ill news travels fast and they already knew all.

"This is a bad business, a bad business," said the immigrant. "They'll hang him, won't they?"

I questioned him and found they had received a very exaggerated account of the affair, as I might have known. A story never loses by being told a second time. I told him how it really was.

"Well, that sounds better, but the way we heard it, it looked pretty black. But Hetty, there, she wouldn't believe anything. She wanted to go right on to Marysville or wherever he's been taken, quick as she heard it. The trust these women have is wonderful now."

I climbed into the wagon with the family and Hetty and delivered the message that Armfield had given me. It was to the effect that she was to take possession of the part of the house he had fitted up for her, and have her friend's wife stay with her for company until his return, which he was confident would be soon. I represented to her that he might be already free and it would be nonsense to go where he was at the present time. It was settled that all should be as he requested, and in a short time the newcomers were safely domiciled in the hotel.

In three or four days a letter came from Armfield, and matters began to look serious. Fielding, the murdered man, had been a farmer and as such employed hands to help him, but being of a peevish disposition the men he hired seldom remained long with him, but as soon as they earned a little money took it and went on to the mines. Three or four days before he was killed he employed a passing man, who gave the name of Shively. Shively was seen by one or two of the neighbors, but they formed no acquaintance with him. One morning Fielding was found in a dying condition, but he lived long enough to tell those who found him that his new man had struck him down, robbed and left him for dead. The search that was made for Shively was a fruitless one. Once he had been

heard of in a distant camp on the headwaters of the Feather River; then the report came that he had been seen on a Panama steamer, going East. The officers concluded he would escape their pursuit, and had given it up, when they heard again that he was at Indian Diggings under an assumed name. This led to the arrest of Armfield, as I have detailed, and the strange part of the story was that those who had seen Shively during the short time he was in Fielding's employ positively identified Armfield as the man.

Hetty had received another letter of similar import. I handed her the one I had received and she read it eagerly. When she had finished she turned to me. "We must go to Marysville," she said, "Will you go?"

"If you wish, certainly."

"I do wish it; you believe him innocent, do you not?"

"I do. A man who commits that crime and once gets out of the State would hardly venture back again, much less have a wife come to join him and settle down."

"I should think it would be easy enough to prove who he is, these people here knew him back home and there are others who knew him when a boy."

"That's not the point, though. Any man can change his name for the time being and that is what

they will claim he has done. We will have to find the true criminal (which I fear is a hopeless task), or find the men Charley was with at the time the crime was committed. The express wagon goes in the morning and will take us to Sacramento in one day. From there we go on the steamboat and will be in Marysville the next afternoon.

I need not detail the incidents of our journey, nor of the meeting between Armfield and his betrothed. Leaving them together, I went to have a talk with the legal gentleman who had been retained for the defense. We had a long consultation and I found his professional feelings were thoroughly interested.

"It would be a plain case of mistaken identity," he said, in conclusion, "were it not for one thing which will be hard to prove. That is the whereabouts of your friend at the time the crime was committed. He tells me that they passed the winter of that year in the Antoine Canyons; that himself and partner found a rich streak there in the fall, kept the knowledge of it to themselves, packed in their provisions quietly and went to work. The first snowfall shut off all communication with the outside, and for four months they saw no human being except each other. They came out of the canyon together, went East together and separated in New York City to go to their respective homes.

Snow, his partner, was a Rhode Island man, but Armfield has forgotten his address."

"Was Snow a married man?"

"No."

"Then he is more than likely to have come back here. We'll put an advertisement in the *Times* and *Transcript* that may bring us information of his present locality."

"Do so," said the old lawyer. "Unless we can find that man Snow, we have a bad case. The most I can do for your friend now is to stave off the trial while we search for him. Do you know," he added, "that we have got to prove him not to be the guilty party; that in the present state of public feelings a verdict of acquittal that left doubts in the minds of the populace might be his death warrant. There have been so many mockeries of justice called trials, within the past year that the people become excited, take the law into their own hands and hang the accused to the nearest tree? Only last week they strung up a man at Quincy against whom there was scarcely a particle of what could be called 'legal evidence.' We must feel our way as we go."

I knew the old lawyer told the truth, and I left his office in no very cheerful frame of mind. Returning to the jail I found Armfield and Hetty in close conversation in the keeper's room. It was

evident that their interview during my absence had been a painful one.

"Now, Joe, I'll tell you what we've planned, or rather what she has planned, for I don't want her to do it. But this girl has ciphered it out that we are to be married at once."

"That's just what you might have expected," said I. "But what then? You can't keep house here, nor do I think you would be allowed even this much liberty after today. This house is pretty well watched, I can tell you."

"I was just coming to that. She'll go back with you and run the house—it's coming on that time of year when it will pay if it ever does. All I've got in the world is put in that house, and I'm in debt besides. Money we must have to get me out of this trouble, and lots of it, too."

I could see no better plan and soon left them together again. That evening the ceremony was performed in the keeper's room in my presence and that of two or three ladies of the young city who had learned Hetty's story and were disposed to give her all the comfort and encouragement in their power. To me the marriage ceremony is always an impressive one, but there are none I can recall in a life of fifty years more sad and solemn of all such occasions it has been my fortune to witness, than on that September evening of 1851.

The news of our return to the diggings brought all the boys in to learn the result of our trip. It is needless for me to say that the story of the wedding at the jail, set off with all the imbellishments proper to the occasion, elicited an unqualified expression of approval.

"That's a girl worth tying to," was the expression of one and all.

Meanwhile the boarding house flourished, and as the absent miners began to come in from their river claims to make final preparations for the winter, its business daily increased. Part of this might have been due to the superior excellence of the viands which graced the long table of the dining room—for Hetty and her immigrant friend presided over the culinary department—but, looking back through a vista of more than twenty-five years, I incline to a belief that a desire to help the young couple out was the dominant feeling which actuated the motley assemblage of boarders at "The Miners' Rest."

But if we were favored in one respect, we were making very little headway in others. The advertisement to ascertain the whereabouts of Snow had been inserted in the papers and appeared in the long list of "information wanted," which formed a leading feature of the advertising of the day. Responses came, but they were unsatisfactory, and at

last came the crushing news that Snow had returned to this State, joined a party of prospectors going north, and was killed by the Indians in the Pitt River Country. With this intelligence, the prospect for a release for Charley Armfield seemed distant indeed.

The rains of autumn had begun and all was life and activity in the camp of Indian Diggings. Not much water was required to run a rocker and enough had fallen to start the little gulches to work. The Indian Diggings began to feel the first flush of prosperity and our business thrived. The express wagon increased the number of its trips to accommodate the increase of business and we no longer had to wait till the end of the week for our letters from Sacramento. "The Miners' Rest" became a sort of postoffice, to which all expecting letters made their semi-weekly resort.

"Wish I was home for a week now," said one of the boarders, a long, lean Yankee, after perusing a letter he received.

"Why don't you wish for three months while you're about it?" Put in another. "If you're goin' to wish, wish for somethin'."

"Oh, a week 'ud do me. That 'ud carry me over Thanksgiving, and that 'ud be all I'd want."

"What in thunder is Thanksgivin'?" asked a son of old "Pike," of me.

"Thanksgiving? Oh, that's a custom in vogue down East. The Governor appoints a day for the people of his State to observe. Some go to church and observe in that way; others have a good dinner and take that means of showing themselves grateful for the blessings of the year."

"Them last fellows are sensible," rejoined my Missouri friend. "There is somewhat to be thankful for if you've got a good dinner. I vote we have a Thanksgivin'."

"It can't be did," said another, who was evidently a stickler for trifles. "We ain't got no turkeys; besides the Guv'nor hain't sot any day for it."

"Turkey be hanged," responded the Missourian, "I'll agree to furnish as fat a deer as can be found twixt here and the Volcano, and that's better nor turkey any day. We can be thankful whether the Guv'nor tells us to or not."

The idea of holding a regular old-fashioned Thanksgiving was received with high favor, especially by the New Englanders present. Although Hetty felt little like entering into anything for the social enjoyment it would bring, yet as a business stroke, it promised well, and she readily agreed to prepare the dinner for as many as chose to come.

In the crowds that came and went I saw many old faces, men who had been on wild-goose chases to distant localities, who had returned with a good

stock of experience, to settle down near the old diggings again. Among them was one who had crossed the plains in the same company with me, but whom I had not seen since reaching the mines. He was now located at Cedarville, six miles distant, and had come over to take a look at the now somewhat famous camp. Our greeting was hearty.

"I want to get acquainted with the woman here before I go back," said he, after we had talked over everything we could think of. "We've come to this spludge today more to give her a little lift than anything else. We've heard about her trouble and like her grit, you bet."

I told him to wait until the work of the day was over and the wish should be gratified. By this time the house was pretty well filled with miners, many of them from a distance who had come over to partake of their first Thanksgiving dinner in the mines.

All things must have an ending and so did that Thanksgiving Day. When the women folks had got their work done for the day I went in with Silverthorn and introduced him to Mrs. Armsfield as an old friend whom the accident of mining life had thus thrown into my presence so unexpectedly. Leaving them together I returned to my place in the bar room where the crowd was getting quite

jolly, and showering out the gold-dust in payment for cigars and liquor with a liberal hand.

He remained in the room with the ladies for an hour or more, and when he came out the boys were breaking up and we went to talking again. He had had a varied experience since we parted and the narration of his adventures was interesting to me.

"I saw one man," said he, "that I s'pose is kin to these women folks. At least I judge so, for his daguerreotype lays with others on the table in there."

"What was his name?" I asked, carelessly.

"Well, I don't know as I ever heard his name. He generally went by the name of 'Missouri Bill.' A rough sort of fellow, too."

"You are mistaken, there. There are no daguerreotypes but those of her own folks. Where did you know this 'Missouri Bill'?"

"Saw him last about three weeks ago, down in Mariposa. And if that ain't his picture, it's that of his twin brother, and I'll swear it."

I stepped hurriedly into the room, and selecting Armfield's picture from the pile of daguerreotypes from the pile handed it to him. "Is that your man?" I asked.

"It is, except the rig. I never saw him in that rig."

"That," said I, "is Charley Armfield; the picture was taken when he was East a year ago."

"Maybe you're right, but I could have sworn it to be the same man."

Our readers need not be assured that with the clue thus obtained we did not let the grass grow under our feet. In less than two weeks Armfield was set at liberty, and his place in the felon's cell filled by the real culprit. I saw the two men together, and when I saw the strongly marked resemblance between them, especially when they were dressed nearly alike in the mining clothes common to all at that period, I did not wonder that those who had only seen Shively casually during the few days he worked for Fielding, should think that in Armfield they saw the accused. I heard afterward that on his trial, this resemblance was dwelt on until the jury refused to bring in a verdict of "willful murder," but compromised on a lower crime, which carried only imprisonment as the penalty.

Charley took hold at "The Miners' Rest" and ran it with great success for a year or two, while I rejoined my partner in the claim. I have not seen him now, for more than twenty years, but I doubt if any of us will ever forget what results followed our first Thanksgiving dinner in the mines.

THE RESERVOIRS

A CHRISTMAS STORY

It was before her at last, in black and white,—the decree of the court with its official seal attached. She was a free woman—free in every sense of the word. Free to resume the name she had borne when a maiden; free to choose her own habitation and mode of life; free, even, to contract a new alliance, which should be severed, perhaps, as coldly as had this been severed, and the words—sweet and solemn they had seemed to her at the time—“what God hath joined together let no man put asunder,” be once more proven a mockery and a lie.

Yet it cannot be said that Mary Willard found happiness, in any sense of the word, in her new-found liberty. For with the decree and its seal lying before her, she could not keep back the visions of the past which rose in her eyes, and would fill their vista whether she would or no. In the happy, happy years gone by, when, amid other scenes and in other lands, she had first found reason to believe herself beloved. In the days so well remembered, when surrounded by the loving friends of herself and her chosen husband, she had

spoken the words so freely and so gladly, which then seemed to have bound her irrevocably to the being at her side. In the years of later date, when standing at the little bed of their only one, they had together watched the fleeting of its spirit, and only turned away at the last moment, when hope seemed to have bidden farewell to their hearts forever, each to find in the whispered words of the other the bond of consolation which only the knowledge of a common sorrow can give. In the still later years, when the spirit of enterprise had sent her husband's strong arm to delve among the mines and mountains of the Golden State, and like the true, good wife she then was, she had followed his fortunes. Why should they come crowding upon her now, mocking her in the hour of her apparent triumph?

We shall not undertake to say that she had been wholly blameless, or wholly to blame for what occurred. Between two fiery natures it needed but a spark to kindle into flame passions which were too proud to admit an acknowledgment of wrong, except in the secret recesses of the heart. A lightly spoken word, given swift currency by the ready breath of scandal, was the seed which had borne a plenteous harvest in the field of ruin to domestic bliss. From this one starting point, others had arisen and, when the final step was taken on the

part of the wife, it had been met with no opposition.

The night before the day on which our story opens had witnessed the closing of the opening storm of winter. For days together the rains had beaten down piteously on the parched earth, while the cheerful patter, patter, on the roofs at night, had carried joy to the hearts of the miners, to whom its welcome sound had been strange for many days. A clear, bright, sunny day, with the air as soft and balmy as in springtime, though the snow-capped summits of the mountains surrounding, from which the dark green of the clumps of fir and pine stood out to relieve the eye from the dazzling brightness of the winter vestments, dispelled such a thought. It was a day too bright and lovely to be passed wholly indoors, and although she knew the ground would be cold and damp beneath her feet, yet a walk would serve to turn the current of her thoughts, which would run into channels that could not be controlled.

She had scarce passed the threshold when she saw an approaching visitor, and intuitively divined that his business was with her, rather than with any of those with whom she was making her temporary home. She turned back, for she was in no mood to seek a partner for her walk in the gentleman whose neatly trimmed whiskers and spotless

linen proclaimed him as one of the "ladies' men" of the camp. The gentleman followed her in and was not long in making his errand known. There was to be a Christmas tree and a good time generally on Christmas eve, he said. Would Mrs. Willard honor him so far as to be his partner on that occasion?

"Of course she will," was the answer which came from Mrs. Sanders, the woman of the house, before Mary had time to make any answer. "She's not agoing to stay mewed up here by herself on that night, for we are all agoing. I'll answer for her, for that."

"I don't know," said Mary, "as I will care to go that evening."

"Well, I do. What on airth will keep you at home? 'Tain't as though you were not free to go where you pleased, and stay as long as you like."

There was a sophistry about this that Mary did not reply to. Still she did not say that she would accept the invitation; neither did she positively decline, and when the gentleman took his departure it was with the implied understanding that he should call for her on the evening in question.

It was not an easy matter for Mary Willard to make up her mind to court society in her present mood of mind. For though the law of the land had been invoked in her behalf, and its decision

had been to her justification, the proud spirit which had upheld her in the presence of others and had borne her through, thus far, in the solitude of her own presence, gave way, and she now looked with bitter regret at the last act, of her own seeking, which had closed the door of reconciliation. How would this news be received at home? How could the opinions of those she held most dear be brought to justify her, as she had been justified by those by whom she was surrounded? It would not be done, she knew, for with them the marriage tie was one not thoughtlessly to be assumed, nor lightly to be shaken off.

The continued chatter of her landlady annoyed her—she wanted to be alone. Resuming the interrupted walk, her feet strayed, almost against her will, into the path leading into the flat where the claim in which George Willard worked was situated. Absorbed in her thoughts, she did not notice this until she was aroused by the familiar voice of one of his partners:

“Why, Mrs. Willard, are you lost?”

She started and looked up.

“Don’t be scared; I ain’t half as bad as I look. Cutting blue bedrock, you know, don’t add much to a fellow’s beauty.”

“Is that what you are doing?” said Mary, glancing at his spattered appearance.

"Well, I should think it was, and has been for the last three months. But there's an end of all things, and there'll soon be one of that."

"George is with you?" she asked.

"Oh, yes; he's up the ditch just now, seeing if there's danger of slides. I've just been up to shut the reservoirs, and I look for him back any minute. Sorry that you and him are two again, and I guess he is, but everybody knows his own business best."

Mary hastened to turn the conversation. "I hope you'll do well," she said; "you've all worked hard enough to deserve it."

"Well, that's so; but unfortunately success does not always reward merit, when it's mining. You've seen old Bill Sharp—Whisky Bill, they call him. He's never out of diggings. When he sticks his pick in the ground, he's got a good claim. Dang it, I'd rather have his luck than a license to steal. But I must get to work," and he turned away.

"Mr. Sims," she called after him. He turned around. "Please say nothing to—to George of having met me, will you?"

"Mum's the word, ma'am, if you wish it. I'll not tell him you *inquired* for him, sartin. That I take is what you mean. I'm sorry, though, you can't come down and see the diggings as you used to. Forty feet in the bedrock now, and timbers so

thick you couldn't drop a hat to the bottom of the ditch. Good-bye."

He was off again and Mary was alone. And which way to go she hardly knew. She did not care to meet her husband that day, above all others, and yet, let her go any way she would, they were liable to meet. She went back to where the trail forked, one branch leading to the reservoirs, the other by the house from which she had come, and which could be plainly seen from the junction. There, catching sight of an approaching figure, she hastily ran behind a thick clump of manzanitas and waited until it should have gone by.

It was George, returning from the trip up the ditch, of which Sims had spoken. It was the first time she had seen him since the action had commenced, for from that time he had sedulously avoided the chance of meeting her. He came along, and from her secure point of observation she watched him with eager eye. As he passed the junction of the trails, he gave a quick glance toward her residence, then moving further on until the undergrowth concealed his form, gazed long and earnestly over the tops of the low bushes toward the spot where he believed her at that moment to be. Perhaps he thought to see her, if but for a moment; but if so he was doomed to disappointment. As it was, unconscious of the gaze

fixed upon him, he turned and moved slowly and sadly away.

Her first impulse was to call after his retreating form, but her tongue refused to do its office. Watching him until he disappeared, she again sought the path and went on—why she knew not—in the direction of the reservoirs. And, indeed, it seemed to her, that in all her movements that day she was not governed by her own volition, but guided by a will superior to her own. The reservoirs were three in number, nearly a quarter of a mile from the claim they were used to work, on the gently rising ground of a “blind” ravine. They were located one above the other in such a way that the water from the upper one would pass through both the others when the gates were hoisted, and the common way of using them had been to hoist all the gates at once, and gauge the flow of water from the lowest and largest of the three. Until now the ditch had not afforded water to fill them all, but the heavy rains of the past few days had increased its volume greatly, and when she stepped upon the bank the crystal stream was pouring through the waste-ways of the upper two, and filling rapidly the one into which she looked.

How clear and bright the water looked that mirrored back her form. It seemed to invite her to that repose, within its depths, which earth denied

her. How strangely she felt today; how her head burned and throbbed. She could look for one moment in the limpid waters and see each pebble in the gravelly bottom; then her head would swim and all grow dark before her vision.

The thought crossed her mind, Why had she come to this spot? Was it only to die? To be found by him, perhaps, when the cold grasp of death was laid upon her? She shuddered at the thought, and moving cautiously to the edge of the slowly rising water, dipped her handkerchief down into it, and bathing her burning brow, found in its icy coldness, some measure of relief.

But not altogether, for yet there was a dimness of vision which had not passed away. For the water, which had at first appeared so clear and limpid in her sight, was now opaque and yellow, rising rapidly, as if hungry for her, while the sound of its rushing filled her ears. She hastened to climb back up the embankment again, and then she knew it was not a deception of the imagination, but a reality that she saw. Softened by the heavy rains, the embankment of the upper reservoir was giving away, and the dissolving earth, through which a channel, rapidly deepening and widening, was cutting its way, was what gave the water before her its yellow tinge. She took in the consequences at a glance. The breaking of the upper

reservoir would be followed, in turn, by that of each of the others, when the combined waters of all would sweep down to the creek in an angry torrent, whose fury nothing could withstand. She knew that if this torrent came upon George and his partners unawares, while they were at work in the deep and narrow bedrock cut of which Sims had spoken, it would give them no chance whatever of escape. Turning away, she stepped cautiously down the bank, until she reached the beaten path, down which she started with the speed of a frightened deer, knowing well that life and death depended upon her footsteps.

It seemed an age to her, although it was but a few minutes before she stood where she could look from the high, perpendicular banks down into the claim. There was no one in sight, and she knew she must go farther with her message of warning, for the dull thud of the heavy picks, mingled in with the sharper, measured clang of the sledge and drill, told her that, as she had feared, they were all working in the deep cut. One glance behind her assured her that there was no time to be lost—already the waters were pouring over the embankment on which she had stood—leaping and flashing in the sunlight as they came. She ran swiftly down the steep, crooked path, and in a moment more stood on the bare, shelly bedrock beside the ditch.

"Oh, Mr. Sims," she cried, for he was the only one she saw, "where are the others? The reservoirs are breaking."

"No!" said Sims, looking up, with his pick poised in readiness for another blow; "is that so? It's only a squirrel hole, I reckon."

"Indeed, it is not," she cried earnestly. "Do tell George to come up. It is running over the big reservoir all around like a wall."

"The d—l it is!" ejaculated Mr. Sims, quite startled out of his sense of propriety. "Hey, boys! Bill, George, Kentuck! Grab your tools and come out. The reservoirs are busted and things will go flukin' here in just no time."

They did not need to be told a second time, but started without standing on "the order of their going." Sims was the first to reach the spot where she stood—just as the roar of the advancing torrent smote upon their ears.

"Where's George?" she asked, her face white with anxiety and terror.

"He was bringing up the lowest level," answered Sims. "He's got a little further to come than them fellers," pointing to the two blasters who had just climbed out. "My God, he's stopped," he continued, as with a deafening crash the stream burst over the bank.

She looked down with a face of despair. To think she should be only a moment too late! He was just beneath them, and as he looked upward their eyes met, for the first time in many days.

"Come up on the timbers," cried Kentuck; "you can't make it in any other way."

He understood the motion accompanying the words, which were lost in the overwhelming roar of the descending waters. Gathering his strength for a mighty effort, he sprang up, and catching one of the lowest timbers, swung himself upon it just as the stream (which had been for a moment checked by a low channel back) passed swiftly under his feet. From brace to brace he came up like a squirrel, and soon the strong arms of his partners had him safely landed. He turned to the spot where he had seen his wife standing, and a cry of agony burst from his heart as he saw her lying, pale and lifeless, with her cheek to the ragged rock.

"Let's take her up, boys," said Kentuck, who of them all seemed to be the most cool and collected. "We ain't out of the woods yet, by a long chalk. That ditch hasn't vent enough to carry what'll be on us in a minute more, and we'd better get up and get out of here while we can."

Tenderly, as if she were an infant, they raised her and started up the narrow trail. Kentuck was right, for scarce had they commenced the ascent

when the final crash came. The last and greatest of the reservoirs was gone—the avalanche of waters tore over the bank in all directions, almost sweeping them from their feet where they stood. It lasted but a minute, but that minute was enough for it to do its work of destruction as effectually as years could have been.

“It’s been touch and go with us, boys,” said Kentuck, as they reached the level ground and paused, partly to take breath and partly to look upon the scene of destruction. “We’d gone to kingdom come with our gum-boots on, if it weren’t for the grit and forethought of this gal. Poor creetur; she stood it bully till she seed you was all right—then she kind of lost her grip, and drapped all holts to wunst. A little good nussin’, though, will bring her ’round. George, old boy, this thing sets infernal rough onto us; don’t it? It’s ondid in a minute what’s taken us years to do. But if it brings that gal and you together agin so’s you’ll *stick*, damme if I don’t say ‘Amen’ to my part of it, jest as long as I live.”

But what Kentuck thought about the “little nussin’ ” did not prove to be the case. The seeds of disease had been in her system; the excitement she had undergone only hastened their development, and for many days her life hung trembling in the balance; while her distracted mind, ever wander-

ing back to the realms of memory, lived in the past, and laid bare the most secret recesses of her heart.

It was days, nay, weeks, ere Mary Willard again opened her eyes with the light of reason shining from within them. She could hardly persuade herself she was not dreaming, for although her apartment had a strangely familiar look, it was not one she could have been led to expect. It was not her room at Mrs. Sanders', but her room at her husband's house, and it looked as though she had never, even for an hour, left it. There was the great mirror in its usual place, her favorite pictures where they had been hung by her own hands, and the snowy coverlet on the bed was the one she had made the first happy summer of her wedded life. She closed her eyes again, and wondered if what she had seen was reality, or only imagination. Gradually it all came to her mind—the separation, the proceedings in the court, and last of all, the walk up the reservoirs and what had followed. She could not reconcile these things with her present surroundings, and hoped that it was but the memory of a painful dream, remembered only for the fancied suffering it had brought her. Her thoughts became confused in trying to solve the problem they had given, and it was only when she essayed to rise upon her elbow and look around her, that

she came to the knowledge of her own weakness. As she fell back to her pillow, there was a quick step to the side of the bed, and she saw the haggard, careworn face of her husband looking down eagerly upon her.

"What has happened, George?" she asked, faintly.

"Don't speak, darling; you have been very sick, but are better now. Now lie very still while I call the doctor, for such are his directions."

He passed from the room and presently returned with the village physician. His view of the patient's condition was a most hopeful one, and with a strict injunction to remain quiet and not permit herself to become excited about anything, he took his departure, leaving them alone.

For a few moments they were silent, when she made a motion which brought his face close to her own:

"I thought I heard music, George?"

"You did, Mary; they are dancing at the hall, in honor of Christmas eve."

Christmas eve. It all came clear to her now. The past was no dream, the remembrance of which she could put aside at pleasure. And this was the Christmas party she had been invited to attend, and to which invitation she had given a half assent. He gathered from her looks that painful

thoughts were passing through her mind, and bending close to her, whispered :

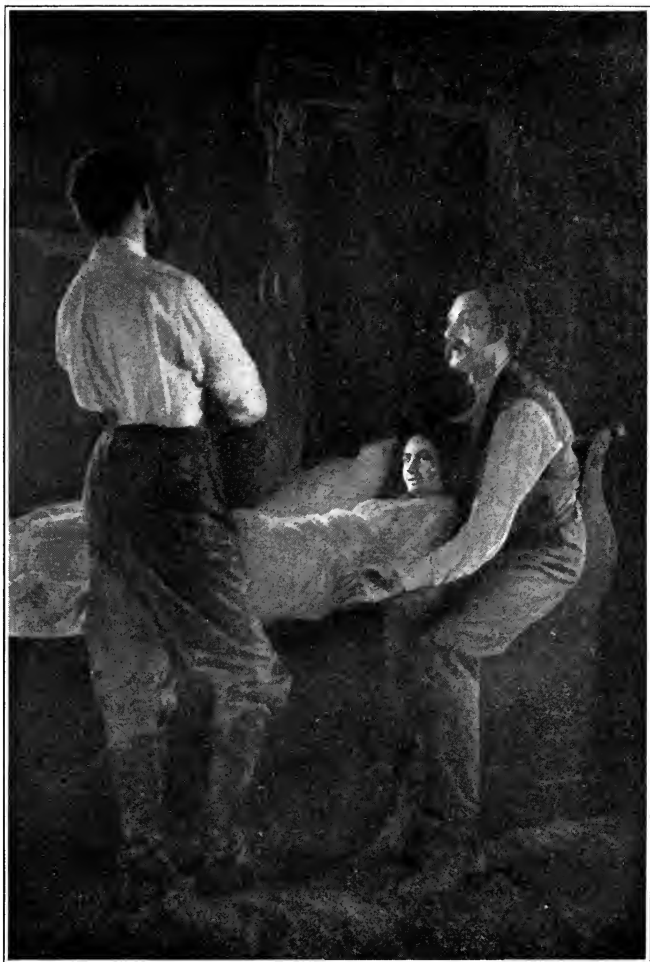
"Mary, we have both been foolish, and it has made us very wretched ; but we will not talk of it now. Try and compose yourself to rest, and when you have the strength to talk to me, I will tell you how I have prayed, God only knows how earnestly, for the moment when I could hear the sweet words of forgiveness fall from your lips. How I have dreaded lest you should be taken from me with those words unspoken. To ask you to trust to me once more, and may God deal with me as I do with thee."

She smiled in reply to his earnest words and manner of speaking, and the wan hand she had given within his own gave a faint pressure. Then she fell into a deep and quiet slumber, which continued until the lengthening shadows were falling from the westward, and the day was far advanced.

She lay quiet for a time, thinking upon her course of action. It did not take her long to decide upon that, and with her determination came visions of the future which enchanted her thoughts. A light step by the bedside awoke her from her reverie, and she saw one of her neighbor ladies standing by her.

"My husband?" she asked.





"—here you are, and not looking nigh as peekid as I thought you would." (See page 105.)

"He'll come at once. He went to lie down and left orders to be called whenever you awoke." And in a moment George was with her.

"Is it Christmas Day?" she asked.

"It is, Mary."

"Peace on earth, and good will to man, upon this day. We will not wait for a better one, George."

He understood her meaning, and a messenger was dispatched for a minister. "There is one other I would like to have present, Mary—Kentuck, and I'll have to go and look for him myself."

She assented with a nod, and he went out. When he returned his true old partner was with him.

"Well, now," said that worthy, cheerfully, "here you are, and not looking nigh as peekid as I thought you would. Why, you'll be as peert and spry as a house lizard in a couple of weeks. How *air* you feelin' anyhow?"

She thanked him and said that she was real well; only rather weak.

"Oh, that's nat'rally to be looked for, you know. Now, I'll have to go again, but I'm liable to drop in on you any minute."

"Not yet," said George; "we want you to stay to our wedding."

"Is that so? Now you're talking sense. This news makes a better Christmas for me than a dol-

lar to the pan in the gravel would. Whose notion was it to have it today?"

"Hers."

"Of course it was," said Kentuck, with a sagacious look. "I'd a knowed that without askin' if I'd a stopped to think. George, she's a trump. She's a heart flush in twenty-deck."

"Kentuck pays you a high compliment," said George to Mary, who looked puzzled. "Everything goes by the cards with him. He means to tell you that you are the best there is."

"That's it, ma'am, exactly. But I tell you, if I thought I could make one 'draw' and get a gal like you, I'd never raise back on two pa'r ag'in. I'd never touch a keerd."

The arrival of the clergyman checked the flow of Kentuck's jargon, and, after a little general conversation, the ceremony was proceeded with. The re-united couple took on themselves the sacred obligations with a far deeper sense of their significance than before. In the months of their separation they had learned to study the faults and failings which were hidden in their own bosoms, and to know that the security of domestic happiness lies in reciprocal kindness and mutual forbearance. Studying each the happiness of the other, neither had occasion to regret the day on which the divorced wife took her solitary walk in the direction of "The Reservoirs."

THE LEGEND OF HUMBUG GULCH

A HOLIDAY STORY WITH A MORAL.

It was always a mystery to most people what kept Jake Morton on Humbug Gulch. It was very true that in early days Humbug had some rich spots in it, and if report told the truth, Jake had, himself, at one time made quite a little "raise" from the banks and bars of that now-condemned stream. But the "raise," if Jake had ever had any, had long since found its way into the pockets of more fortunate men, while Jake alone, of the many miners who had at different times, essayed to make Humbug pay, still lived there and worked among its boulders. If Humbug had ever had a palmy day, it must have been many years ago, for it was pretty well understood, among the *quid nuncs* who are to be found in every mining camp, that Jake Morton had not made a good day's wages there for four years. He always got a little gold, they knew; enough so that he kept his accounts pretty well balanced with the merchants and butchers of Slabtown, which romantically named village was the source from which the Hermit of Humbug drew his

supplies, but then, if a man wants to work for just his "grub," he can make that almost anywhere, and not be compelled to camp off in such an out-of-the-way place as that which he had chosen.

But Jake Morton had a theory of his own in relation to the diggings on Humbug, and that theory he wisely kept to himself. So the stray miners whom curiosity in regard to Jake's movements, or a desire to win success by striking a prospect where everyone else had failed, who from time to time made their appearance at Jake's cabin, armed with pan and pick and other paraphernalia of "ye prospector," always left with a profound disgust, both of the gulch itself, and of any man who would fool away his time by staying in such a miserable section, where, as "Kentuck No. 1" once said, "A man might ground sluice a year before he'd take out gold enough to fill a holler tooth." So bad, indeed, had become the reputation of the Humbug diggings, that even John Chinaman, with his everlasting rocker, seldom strayed up that way, but on the other hand gave them a wide berth. All this, however, was just what Jake desired. He had been on the gulch so long that he knew just where every good spot in it had been, and he could pick around these spots and make a few dollars at any time when, in trying to prove the truth of his theory, he found himself running "light."

The winter had set in unusually stormy, and the holidays had arrived, when the events detailed in this most truthful legend are said to have transpired. For several days the rain had poured down in torrents, swelling each little stream beyond its due proportions, while the tops of the hills and the sides of the loftier mountains were clothed in the fleecy garments of snow. Jake stood in the door of his old log cabin, looking out upon the swollen stream and the gloomy sky, with a most discontented expression of countenance. If an "honest miner" of the present day should look upon such a scene with the slightest degree of disapprobation, he would be at once adjudged a fit candidate for Stockton, for miners now believe if we could only have a "wet winter" the whole year around we would soon get rich. But the secret of Jake's discontent was this: he wanted to go to town. Man is defined to be an animal gregarious in instincts, and Jake, albeit he lived and worked by himself, could enjoy the society of his fellow-man as well as anybody. Moreover, it was the last day of the year, and the idea of commencing a New Year in the solitudes of Humbug Gulch was, for some reason, unusually distasteful to its lone inhabitant. He studied some time profoundly whether he should defy the elements and make a start anyhow. But the thought of wading through the ice-cold

waters of Gambler's Ravine, and then perhaps finding the footbridge washed away at the White Mule Gulch, was too strong for him, and with a last lingering look at the darkening sky, he gathered an armful of dry wood from the shed and entered his cabin.

The short winter day soon drew to a close, while the storm without raged with renewed fury. When Jake had eaten supper and put things a little to rights, he piled a fresh lot of wood in the broad fire-place, and, drawing a comical imitation of an easy chair before the cheerful fire, fell into a dreamy reverie. Naturally enough his thoughts reverted to the scene of by-gone days, to the holiday festivities which had been so heartily celebrated in the old house at home, and the temptation to compare his present mode of life to that to which he had been accustomed became irresistible. He looked around upon the bare walls of the rough cabin which had been his home for so many weary years, and took mental note of the rude furniture which formed its only embellishment. A few pots and skillets, blackened with long and constant use; two or three frying pans hanging to nails driven in the logs; dishrags nailed to the end of a stick; a pine table, on which stood one clean plate and half a dozen dirty ones; these, with a broom and an old, long-handled shovel (which had once done

duty in the claim and now did the same in the fireplace) standing in the corner, constituted the adornments of his home. A little shelf on which were ranged a number of books, was the only thing that had a home-like appearance to him that night. One glance was enough for Jake, who elapsed into his reverie again, while the storm raged on without, and the waters of the gulch, a few rods from the door, roared in a manner which told of their fast gathering strength.

"This *is* a sweet old place for a man to be in on New Year's eve," soliloquized Jake, who, like men generally who are much alone, had contracted the habit of talking to himself. "It's just as good though as to be down-town. What's Christmas or New Year more than any other day to a fellow in the mines? Let me find that lead once that the Fleming boys had, and I'll get to a civilized country, quicker."

Oh, ho, Mr. Morton, so it's the search for a lost lead that keeps you a resident of Humbug! Well, we know a great many miners who have hunted for a pay-streak that somebody else had in former years, but it's not very often that they find it.

His eyes wandered sleepily around until they again rested on the old shovel in the corner.

"You've been a pretty good shovel in your day," said Jake, apostrophizing the battered tool; "you

helped me to work out the best spot I ever found in the gulch. I'd like to find another spot like that."

"What good would it do you?" returned the shovel, which seemed to take on some semblance to a human form and advance toward him.

Jake started from his seat at hearing the shovel address him so curtly. But the shovel was sitting just as he had left it, and he settled back in the old chair again.

"Steamboated again," muttered Jake, "though I could almost swear it spoke to me. But it's as big a humbug as the gulch itself."

There was no mistake that this time the shovel *did* walk out of its corner and slipped in between Jake and the fire.

"So; you think I'm a humbug, do you? Well, since we are on Humbug and on humbugs, what are you, sir?"

The idea of an old fire-shovel walking about the room and punning in this manner was too much for him; he couldn't answer a word.

"You're an arrant humbug yourself, Jake Morton," said the shovel, answering its own question. "And now I want you to tell me what good it would do you to find another spot?"

"I'd go back home," responded Jake.

"Fudge! why didn't you go when you had finished working the first spot?"

Jake couldn't form a suitable answer, so the shovel answered for him again.

"You were too proud to do it. You thought you might be laughed at if you came back from the golden land with a few hundred dollars. You would be just the same way again. You're a pretty good fellow, Jake, and generally mean well; but you've got your faults, and must get rid of them. You must, tomorrow, commence with the New Year and turn over a new leaf."

Jake did not know whether to be angry or not at being talked to in such plain language. But he wisely concluded he could make nothing by quarreling with the old blade, so he held his peace.

"You went to town on Christmas day and took nine dollars with you. You bought a piece of ham and some little things besides, and came back 'broke.' How did you spend your money?"

Jake was ashamed to answer. But his companion seemed to read his thoughts and answered for him, as usual.

"I'll tell you, Jacob. You bought a raffle ticket for something you couldn't have used if you had won it. Then you fell in with some of your old chummies and treated them. To wind up with, you played a few games of cards for the drinks, and came home without a cent."

Jake felt that he could not dispute a word that was said.

"And I'm sorry to say, Jacob, that this fault is growing on you. Once you played these social games just to pass away time. Now, you think that a glass of liquor occasionally does you good. In this way you squander enough every year to take you back to your old home, where loving eyes grow dim watching for your return. Look to the east."

Jacob turned his eyes in the direction indicated, and looked upon a scene which brought his heart to his lips. It seemed as though the broad expanse of mountain, hill and plain which stretched between him and his former home had been leveled down, and while every landmark of the long and tedious road which he had traveled years before was marked down with photographic minuteness, yet space seemed to be annihilated, and he could look into the old farmhouse of his parents as easily as if he were standing at the kitchen window. It was a familiar scene to him, and one which he had often recalled in imagination—an old couple seated at the table—the old man reading aloud from a newspaper, while his wife plied the knitting needles.

As Jacob looked, the old man laid down the paper and, taking off his spectacles, drew his chair nearer the fire. For a few moments there was

silence, broken only by the click of the knitting needles.

"If Jacob was only with us tonight," said the old man, half to himself and half to his companion.

The knitting work fell into her lap, and as she bent her head over it the tears flowed steadily upon it. "Poor boy," she said at last; "I was thinking of him all day."

"It is nigh onto fifteen years since he left us, wife," said the old man after a little. "He was only to be gone three years, and it's stretched out to this time."

"It's not his fault that he hasn't come, I'll be bound," said the mother, coming at once to the defense of her absent boy. "No, indeed, it *cannot* be."

"Maybe not, wife; we'll think not anyway. I've sometimes thought that if Em'ly had waited a little longer, it might have been the means of drawin' him back. He used to think a power of that girl."

"Emily did just right," responded his wife. "She waited four years, and that is long enough for a girl to wait for anybody. She had to look out for herself after her father died, and there could be no home like her own. Suppose she had waited until now, as we have done."

"Well, I'm not blaming the girl, wife; I was only supposin' a case, as they say. Well, God bless him, wherever he is."

As the mother uttered a fervent "Amen," Jacob turned his head to wipe the tears which had gathered in his own eyes. When he looked again, he saw nothing but the walls of his cabin.

"I'll be with them," muttered Jake, clearing his voice; "they won't be waiting and waiting for me on another New Year's eve."

"Shall I show you anything more?" asked his companion.

"Anything you will," said Jacob, "what you show me can only be for my good."

The sides of the cabin opened again, and he saw that he was gazing down upon a newly settled country. Lofty mountains were divided by valleys, and he could see, by looking closely down through the branches of magnificent forest trees which covered the whole face of the land, that in all these valleys where streams of water flowed, bands of men were at work. As he listened, he could hear, in the hum of busy industry, which rose above the forests, the dull thud of the pick, the sharper clang of the shovel and the rattle of the rocker. He looked among the workers, and in one group recognized his own form.

"That was a scene of fifteen years ago," said his companion. "What a sturdy lot of fellows they are. Young men, too, nearly all. There's hardly a gray-beard among them. Look at them now."

The scene changed in a second's space. It was easy to look upon it now, for in many places the forest trees had been swept away until hardly a good-sized bush remained. Around and among these denuded spots there were miners still at work. Many of them were the same he had seen when he looked before, but their features bore the marks of premature old age, and their faces were care-worn, as if hope had ceased to dwell in their bosoms.

"That is a scene of today," said the shovel. "Oh, Jacob Morton, what have you to show for those lost fifteen years?"

"Nothing," replied Jacob.

"Nothing. Have you spent fifteen of the best years of the brief existence allotted to man amid scenes like these, and received nothing but what has fed and clothed you? Do you call a ruined constitution and failing health nothing? You have sown in the storm that others might reap in the sunshine; you, and those others whom you see have by their toil built up a great and wealthy State, and yet are today among the poorest of her people. The wealth you have dug from the ground has

gone to enrich others, and now that old age is creeping on you all, what is to be the end?"

"I cannot tell," said Jacob.

"I can," said his companion. "Look once more at what the end will be fifteen years in the future."

Jacob looked and saw before him a large building, which he knew at once was maintained at public expense. Half a dozen or more, whose features were familiar to him as men who had been his mining comrades in former years, were seated before its doors. Apart from those were two others, who seemed to be connected with the establishment. They were joined by a third.

"Well, how's the Forty-niner now?" was asked of the newcomer.

"Oh, he's gone at last," was the reply.

"The best thing that could have happened him. He was a hard working man until they brought him here, and although he wasn't a lucky miner, if he had only taken care of what he did make, would have never been brought here at all. But he had his "forty-nine" habits to the last, and never seemed to realize how times had changed. Well, let's get rid of him at once."

They entered the building, and in a brief space of time re-appeared, bearing a rude, pine coffin. Jacob could look within it and see his own features. His old companions fell into the pro-

cession, and hobbling to the burying ground, stood by while the coffin was being lowered into the grave.

"Fill it up quick, boys. Chuck in that big rock there; anything to get him out of the way."

The rock came down with a deafening crash—and Jacob Morton awoke. Awoke to find the fire had burned down to a few ashy coals, while a sensation of coldness pervaded his frame; awoke with such a strong conviction of the reality of what he had seen, that it was some minutes before he could bring himself to believe that it was an illusion. Awoke with that strange, instinctive consciousness of impending danger which often comes upon us, even when we have not the least idea of from what quarter the danger may come.

"Well, well, well! if this don't bang everything in the line of dreaming that ever I experienced, may I be darned," muttered Jake, as he groped for a match to re-light the candle. "Old shovel," he continued affectionately apostrophizing that instrument, "if I ever *do* get to a Christian land again, I'll take you along and keep you in a glass case; I will, darn me if I don't."

He was so tender of the old, blackened blade, that he would not even rake the dying embers of the fire together with it, as had been his wont, but poked them up in a heap with a stick. Then he

threw on a little light wood and settled down in the easy chair again.

He filled and lighted his pipe, and smoked sometime in silence. Meantime the conviction of approaching danger grew stronger upon him and was not to be shaken off.

"What in thunder ails me?" he muttered again; "has that confounded dream had such an effect on me as this? It seems strange that the gulch don't make any more noise; it was roaring like a cataract when I went to sleep. The storm has stopped, but the stream hadn't ought to run down as quick as this."

He hastily put on his slippers (made of a pair of old boots which had been cut off at the instep) and, throwing his coat over his shoulders, took the candle and stepped out of doors. There was a well-beaten path to the gulch over which he had carried the water for household use for years. A few steps brought him to the bed, and he held up his hand in wonder at the sight. Where had been a foaming torrent a few hours before he could now cross, by stepping from stone to stone, without wetting his slippered feet. Jake comprehended the situation at once.

"There's been a slide up the canyon," he soliloquized, "and a big one, too, or it would never have

shut off the water so dry. I must travel out of this at once."

As he came up on the flat again, he cast an involuntary glance up the canyon he had spoken of. Instead of the gap which had marked the spot before, it looked like a mountain wall all the way across. It had been the roar of this earth avalanche which had roused him from his dream.

Entering the cabin, he hastily made a couple of bundles of things most valuable and useful to him, and swinging them on the old shovel, Chinaman fashion, he issued forth. He was not a moment too soon, for at the first glance he saw that the pent-up waters from above were already breaking through their barrier, and that in a few minutes the whole vast mass would move upon the spot where he was standing. Seizing his bundles, he climbed the mountain side to a safe place, and sat down to await the result. And now the whole mass was in motion, creeping slowly, bodily down the gulch. A moment more, as the wet earth settled down, the waters began to pour over the summit and tear a channel down through the center. As the volume of water increased and the channel deepened, great trees fell in from either side, snapping off like pipe-stems, while huge boulders were caught up by the roaring waters and swept away like bunches of foam. While the top of the slide was thus being

torn to pieces, the whole, pressed on by the weight of the lake above, moved down the gulch with increasing speed. The cabin withstood its force for a moment—and for a moment only—then its logs were torn asunder and it moved on with the rest. It was a grand sight, yet terrible in its grandeur.

For an hour Jake sat and watched the scene, by which time the waters had spent their force. Then he shouldered his bundles and made his way down the gulch to where there were some old cabins, in one of which he left his load and thence made his way to town. To say that Jake felt down-hearted at this sudden turn in his affairs would not fully describe his feelings. To borrow his own language, he “felt worse at being driven out of Humbug in this manner than he did when he first left home. You see,” added Jake, explainingly, “when I left home to come here, I was young and buoyant with health and hope; I had the world before me and it seemed impossible that I should fail of success. Now, I’ve been here on the gulch so long that it seems more like home to me than anywhere else that I’ve got the means to go to.” There is more than one miner that we know of, Jake, that could talk exactly as you do.

There was no lack of sympathy for him among his brother miners, when it became known that his cabin had been swept away by the slide. It took a

substantial form, too, for he had a dozen offers of a chance to camp with one and another, until he saw an opportunity to do better. One of these offers he gladly accepted, and went over to get the things that he had left in the deserted cabin, scattered along the gulch, and take a last look at his old home.

He hardly knew the once familiar place. Where the waters of the gulch had run on the night where he stood in his slippers and looked down on its empty bed, was now piled many feet deep with the red mountain earth, while the stream itself, turned from its original course, had cut a new channel through the little flat on which the cabin and garden patch had stood. Jake could not bear to look on his desolated home, and hastened away.

The little good fortune he had while on Humbug seemed to have deserted him in his new locality, and it was not long before the thought of that "lost lead" on Humbug became too strong to be resisted. How prone old miners are to wander, perhaps many miles away from some scene of their earlier experiences, be gone perchance for years, and then return to work some spot which they had had in their mind's eye through all their wanderings! Thus it was with Jake, who, with the return of spring, wended his way back to Humbug. But he was more fortunate than his class in general, for under

the site of his former house in the new channel of the gulch, he found, not the lost lead of Humbug, but a fair-paying claim, from which, by a summer's work and the practice of a better economy than that to which he had been used, he laid by enough to keep the promise he had made in his dream, and return to the old homestead before another New Year's eve.

Whether Mr. Morton, after his return, found some fair one to take that place in his heart once held by the perfidious Emily this legend sayeth not, but from the opinion which I entertain of man in general I am inclined to believe he did. I am confirmed in this view of the case by the fact that, for awhile he kept writing about coming back, but in his last letter to a Slabtown chum, he tells him that if he'd go to Humbug and run a drift one hundred feet into Gas Point he will strike that lead which the Fleming brothers had, *sure*.

THE JOES

It is not my purpose to describe, with minute particularity either the "Joes," or the place where they had found an abiding place, temporary at first, but which bid fair to become a permanent one as the years rolled on and still found them in the old spot. The Joes were characters in their way. Few, if any, of their neighbors could have given any designation of them, other than I have given. There was a tradition, current among the inhabitants of Last Chance, that at one time the storekeeper had kept an account against "Bagley & Co.," for the two Joes, but which was Bagley, and which the "Co.," was a thing the wisest inhabitant of Last Chance would have hesitated to declare. It was even hinted that Cale Durkee, who had acted as clerk of the election board for a number of years successively, had written down their names, but as the Joes had not voted for a number of years, for reasons we will hereafter explain, and as Cale professed to have forgotten the names in the flurry of the occasion, his superior opportunities for knowledge were lost to the community.

In personal features and build, the Joes were very much alike, as also in respect to age, both being somewhere along the middle thirties. Each rejoiced in the possession of a full and flowing beard, but as the beard of one was a dark brown while that of the other was inclined to be sandy, this distinguishing trait was sufficient to suggest proper appellations, so, while they were collectively spoken of as the Joes, the respective members of the firm were on occasions known as "Brown Joe," and "Sandy Joe." Rumor further had it, upon the authority of the ubiquitous John Smith, who was looked upon in our town as the political oracle, that Brown Joe was a rank Democrat of the Secession stripe, and Sandy Joe, the blackest, of Black Republicans. But this disagreement of political opinion was by no means the cause of strife between them, as neither tried to convert the other, in fact, it was a positive advantage in one way, for it kept them from being "electioneered" by the local candidates, as the vote of one would generally offset that of the other and so, as a matter of fact, they generally stayed at home and worked in the claim, or at some other job on hand, leaving the destinies of this great republic to be settled by those sovereigns not so happily situated.

It was on Christmas Day, that some of the events which go to make up the thread of this

eventful story transpired and the Joes were in their cabin. A nice little cabin it was, too, located in the center of a piece of creek bottom land which the judicious husbandry of Brown Joe had caused to bring forth huge cabbages, great rutabagas, gigantic squashes and all sorts of "garden truck" in its season. The Joes, as we have said, were in their cabin, for there was no thought, of course, of going into the claim to work on *that* day. They had read and re-read the last papers, talked out every subject which presented itself to their minds, and at last, relapsed into smoke and silence.

"Joe." It was Brown Joe who spoke.

"Well, Joe; what is it?"

"What shall we have for dinner?"

Sandy Joe at once went into deep meditation on the momentous question thus presented. Finally he took out his pipe, knocked out the ashes on the rocks of the fireplace and answered, half responsively, half inquiringly:

"Oysters?"

"Oysters be hanged," said Brown Joe.

It is my desire to be truthful in this report of the dialogue between the respective partners, so I put in Brown's exact words, though I must say they were uttered with more than necessary emphasis. Sandy took it as a matter of course and only grinned.

"Oysters are fa'r grub, when you've got plenty of fresh milk an' the right kind of crackers, which we hain't; but I ain't much stuck on the dern things at any time. I'd rather have a piece of fresh po'k any day."

"Perhaps the widow will send us another mince pie," suggested the other.

"The widow be ——," retorted Brown Joe, with more emphasis than before, and truthful as I may desire to be, I shall stamp my disapproval of his language by refusing it a place in this history.

Sandy settled back in his chair and gave a huge guffaw, in which, after a little, his partner joined.

"The widder thought she was playin' it mighty sharp," continued Brown. "When she seed *me*, she sorter hinted I was the chap on whose account them pies was sent, but when she seed *you*, why you was the chap and it was all right until we got to comparin' notes, an' then she was played out with both of us."

Sandy grinned as if in approval of his partner's remarks.

"Widders is queer critters," continued Brown Joe, reflectively. "Now, this un is ready to share either on us for life, with a pretty fa'r sized family to start with. An' it ain't the fust time I've had a chance to take the place of the dear departed. I remember onct, back in Missouri, about——"

But Sandy had heard the story of his partner's narrow escape about forty times, already, and we all know that the best of stories will be spoiled by telling them too often to the same person. So he incontinently disappeared into the next room and we were thus cruelly bereft of the benefit of Brown Joe's experience with the widow of Pike.

Sandy soon reappeared, equipped with a hunting bag and shotgun, the last of which he proceeded carefully to load, explaining as he did so, that he had three or four times lately scared up a flock of quail at the head of Dutch Ravine, and if he could come across them today, he could furnish material for a dinner fit for any day, only it would have to be a little late.

"I thought about them," said Brown, "but I never could shoot one of them scatterguns and the durned things won't sit still long enough to pick their heads off with a rifle. Howsomever, you get the quail, and I'll get everything else ready, an' we'll have as good a feed as any on 'em."

Sandy departed on his murderous mission, and Brown, good as his word, began at once to get the other things in readiness. The remnants of the morning meal were put into the frying pan ready to "warm up," the potatoes were peeled and sliced, the coffee ground and Brown Joe, with the air of a man who has accomplished his mission in

this world, seated himself in the rocking chair after fishing up an old copy of *Harper's* and patiently awaited his partner's return.

Joe searched in vain through the columns of the old magazine to see if he could find something which had been overlooked before, but I am sorry to say without success. As a matter of course he did the next best thing to do, and fell asleep in the chair, sleeping so soundly that he did not hear a wagon drive up and stop in the road opposite their door. Even when a large trunk was brought and placed in the porch, and a woman's voice outside should have been distinctly heard, he had only an indistinct idea of what was transpiring and fell to dreaming that the widow was about to make a *coup d'état* upon him in his partner's absence. It was not until there came a loud, clear knock at the door, that Joe awoke shivering, for during his long slumber the fire had burned quite low.

"Knock away, gol durn yer," growled Joe, his thoughts at once reverting to his dream. But when the knock was repeated, Joe saw that he might as well face the music at once, so he called out: "Come in."

Instead of obeying the direction given, there came another knock. Joe got up unwillingly and moved toward the door, growling at every step he took. But when he reached and opened the door



"Why don't you ask me to come in? It makes no difference, for I'm coming anyway." (See page 131.)

he saw a sight which well might cause him to start back in surprise. Instead of the widow and her "tribe," as he looked for, his eyes rested on the fair form and features of a young lady of, perhaps, twenty summers, who looked up at him with an amused, expectant smile, which Joe afterwards declared "took the breath plumb out of him."

"Beg pardon, ma'am; I didn't know—the fact is I thought it was——," and Joe stopped, not knowing what to say; a practice we consider a very good one and hereby recommend to our readers.

"Well, Mr. Joe, have you forgot all your manners in this country? Why don't you ask me to come in? It makes no difference, for I'm coming anyway," and suiting the action to the word, the fairy planked herself down in the very rocking chair which Joe had just vacated, and, suggesting that her ride had been a cold one, mildly hinted that a little more fire would be acceptable.

Joe started for the woodshed and then for the first time saw the traveling equipments on the porch. This palled him worse than ever. "Looks as if she had come to stay. Why didn't I go huntin' and leave Sandy here to entertain these stray women what come along? And she had my name pat, too. Dang it; I wish Sandy would come home; it's about time for him. Danged if I can make it out."

Joe finished his soliloquy and coming in replenished the fire, then taking a seat in front of his strange visitor, he watched her in silence.

"Joe, you dear, old fellow; don't you know me?" And before Joe could realize what she was about, she had fastened her arms about his neck and after two or three warm kisses, which poor Joe endured passively, she burst into a spell of crying.

"I *meant* to take you by surprise, Joe; and I did it, didn't I? After father died, I told mother I was going to come here and bring you home again. You'll go with me, won't you, Joe?"

Joe didn't know what to say, but felt that he must say something. So he faintly responded: "Maybe—some of these days."

"After a while when you get the claim all worked out. Yes, Joe. I'll keep house for you 'till then, you don't know what a famous house-keeper I've got to be, Joe. You'd hardly think it of the little girl you left at home when you went off to that horrid war with Mexico, and never came back again. Now, Joe, I'll just get rid of my traveling dress and then we'll have a great talk. Just help me fetch in my trunk, that's a good fellow."

Joe obeyed mechanically, then went outside and relapsed into a deep train of thought. "Can't see into this, by a doggoned sight. She knows me, knows my name and knows I went off with Doni-

phan's boys to Mexico, but, danged if I know her. I wonder if I ain't dead and this is the first taste of heaven? Or maybe, I'm only asleep and dreaming all this just for a slant." Joe had picked up a broken hoe handle in his reverie and was twirling it when it slipped from his fingers and lighting squarely on his pet corn, convinced him that he was not only alive, but thoroughly awake. As he gave a suppressed howl of anguish, the door opened and his sphinx came forth.

"And I may have a flower garden in the spring, too, Joe, if we stay here; can't I?"

"Oh, sartin."

"And where shall I have it? I shall want you to go to work on it early in the spring."

"Oh, anywhere you like," said Joe, desperately. "Alongside the trail thar or anywhere else. You can put the posies wherever you like."

"You dear, good fellow," said the girl, and again a pair of soft arms were entwined about his neck and a pair of rosy lips pressed to his own. Let us here record that Joe did not submit to this as passively as he had at first. The wicked fellow just knew there was some mistake, but was too kind-hearted to tell her of it just yet.

"Hello, there; what's all this? Ain't you folks cutting things a little fat?" broke in a voice at a

distance. They looked and saw Sandy returning with the shotgun and two or three quail.

"It's my pardner," explained Brown Joe.

"So you did write to us that you had a partner, and a real good fellow you said he was, too. Do you know, Joe, I think I'll fall desperately in love with him, just because he is your partner?"

Sandy, in the meanwhile, had reached the porch where they were standing, and looked curiously at the pair. Brown was covered with confusion at the situation, but nevertheless attempted to perform the ceremony of introduction.

"This is my pard, Miss," said Brown. "Sandy we call him for short. This, pard, is a young lady who has favored us with a visit. Don't know her name, or I would tell yer."

"Don't know my name?" cried the young girl, with a merry laugh. "Perhaps you don't know your own, either?"

"Yes, I do," returned Joe, stoutly. "My name is Joe Bagley, in any place."

"And yours?" she asked, turning to his companion.

"My name is Joe Semple," said Sandy.

The young lady did not faint. Far from it. She simply gave poor Brown Joe a look which made him shrink in his boots, and turning to his partner,

said: "Joe, I am your sister, Rosa." Then she walked into the house, followed by Sandy.

"I guess I'd better make tracks for town and speak for grub at Old Storms' hash house for a while the way things look," muttered Brown Joe, when they had been gone a few minutes. In pursuance of this laudable intention he had reached the road and was about starting down it when his partner's voice was heard:

"Which way, Joe?"

"Down to the Burg."

"Now, don't be a durned fool. Come back here. We'll all go pretty soon and make some temporary arrangements to stay there till we can get things fixed up to keep her here. Come back, I say."

* * * * *

In a little community like Last Chance, where there is no daily arrival of the stage, no rush and roar as the train comes puffing up to the depot; no telegraph to give us news of what is transpiring in the outside world, the inhabitants, for the want of something else to talk about, must of necessity, talk about each other. Having thus given a reason for the amount of local gossip which is to be found in every country town, we have paved the way for stating that the tongue of innocent gossip found

rich theme in the acts of Brown Joe during the year following the Christmas Day we have spoken of. It was first a subject of gossip that Brown Joe had taken extensively to the wearing of "biled shirts," when in the judgment of many of his mining confreres he looked much better in a gray one. There were several other articles of personal adornment which Mr. Bagley indulged in, each of which, in turn became the subject of invidious comment. But when John Smith came to the front again, with the astonishing information that Brown Joe was actually going to "split" his ticket at the coming election, the *quid nuncs* took the matter into serious consideration and unanimously resolved that Brown Joe was "stuck to death after his pard's sister," and that was what was the matter with Joe.

So far as the voting part was concerned I don't think the aforesaid *quid nuncs* reached a wise conclusion, simply for the reason that when a man gets older he generally has more sense, no matter what his politics are, and besides, women don't often bother themselves about politics, outside of Wyoming. But otherwise I am inclined to think, in the light of subsequent events, they were correct. At any rate, the conclusion first came to by Sandy Joe and his sister, that they would go back to "Suckerdom" the next year, was entirely abandoned, and from some observations made to me by Brown Joe,

just before I left Last Chance for Scrubb's Dig-gings, I felt satisfied that my worthy friend thought it was himself, and himself only, who had persuaded Rosa to stay.

CYRUS BILLINGS' DREAM

The storms of the winter had set in at last, and the pitiless manner in which the rains were poured upon the earth's surface indicated that the clouds were making up for the long delay. Already each little gulch and mountain swale was sending down its tributary stream to swell the torrent which foamed and roared as it sped on its way to old Ocean.

In such a day, humanity studied its comfort by remaining within doors, and it was only the unfortunate possessors of claims in the extreme dry diggings who were out at labor in the storm, for with them, the reverse of the maxim, "Make hay while the sun shines" obtained. But the gloomy weather did not bring a corresponding feeling of gloom to the hearts of the mining gentry of Central Hill. No, no; for they had watched the skies anxiously for weeks past, and now the roar of the wind through the pine forests and the beating of the rain against the window pane was sweet music to their ears.

And to none did the sound of the beating storm come more sweetly than to Cy. Billings.

And well it might be so, for Mr. Billings was one of the mining princes of Central Hill. Rain meant an increased water supply and more water meant more gold dust for him. What *he* wanted of more dust, except to pile away with the thousands he already must have in some safe place, was more than his most intimate acquaintance could have conjectured. A covetous, grasping man, yet not miserly (for he never stinted himself), without wife, parent or kindred, it seemed as if the gifts of God were misdirected, when such continued good fortune followed one who used them for himself alone, while others, more worthy and more needy, struggled along, living from hand to mouth, as the saying goes, though long hours of toil in the heat of summer and storms of winter should have brought them better fate.

Yet, he had not always been thus. Tradition, faint, 'tis true, yet still extant, though it would have been hard to tell the authority upon which it rested, told of a time when Cyrus Billings was a generous, warm-hearted fellow, happy in the love of a beautiful girl, who had promised to become his wife at a time in the near future. Already they had fixed upon the place of their future home, a neat little cottage at the foot of the mountain, where the dark spruce trees cast their grateful shade throughout the heated summer days, while in the

springtime the fragrant bloom of the thickly growing lilacs perfumed the air and gladdened the vision. But Death tore his promised bride from his outstretched arms, and in a few days more came the news that the bank in which he had deposited his savings while preparing for the new life in contemplation, had failed and left him penniless. For a time he left the place, whose associations were fraught with so much of both sorrow and joy, and when months afterwards he came back, he was an altered man. Then it was that he found the claim on Central Hill which yielded largely from the first. But, except that he surrounded himself with more comforts than your ordinary miner cares to have, his wealth did him little good.

There was a lull in the storm, but Cyrus, absorbed in reading one of the many books with which his cabin was supplied, did not notice it. Pleased that matters were progressing so well to his interest he had fallen into a reverie, from which he was only aroused by a light tap at the door of his cabin. Wondering who and what business any one could have with him that could bring them out on such a day as this had been, he opened the door, and saw three ladies standing on the porch. With two of these ladies he was acquainted, they being the wives of the storekeeper and blacksmith,

with whom he generally did business, but the third he had never seen.

"Why, ladies!" exclaimed Cyrus, astonished at the sight, as well he might be. "Come in quick, and get as near the fire as you can." And Cyrus stirred the embers in the fire-place, put on a few light sticks and soon had a cheerful blaze sending a ruddy warmth to the chilled frames of his guests.

The ladies were not slow in following his directions, and in due time Cyrus was introduced to the stranger guest, who proved to be the sister of an old partner of Cyrus.

"Our call is quite unlooked for, is it not, Mr. Billings?" inquired Mrs. Simcoe, the blacksmith's wife.

"Quite, indeed," responded that gentleman. "This is not a day for any one to be out of doors."

"We went up to Forest Ridge this morning when it looked pleasant, and have been detained there by the storm. We took advantage of the lull to start for home, and as your house was one we designed visiting, stopped here on our way back. We are out on a mission of charity."

At the mention of this ominous word Mr. Billings knit his brows, but showed no further interest, so the speaker, after a moment continued:

"It is coming on to the days when all should rejoice and be happy; but, in the dispensations of Providence, it is so fated that all cannot. It is for those who can to supply from their abundance, that those who have not may feel that they are not altogether forgotten. This paper will show you more fully what we intend."

Cyrus took the proffered paper mechanically and glanced at it. It set forth that those whose signatures were appended had donated the sums set opposite their names to the Ladies' Christmas Committee for the purpose of enabling that body to relieve the wants of certain poor families and persons of Central Hill and vicinity, that they, too, might participate in the enjoyments of the day.

"I don't think I shall help you any ladies," said Mr. Billings, handing the paper back. "I ain't much on the give. If people would work and take care of what they earned, they wouldn't need help for Christmas, or any other day."

"True, Mr. Billings, at times. But there are times when the most worthy seem doomed to misfortune, and even if people do bring trouble on themselves we should not withhold our sympathies in all cases. We are none of us perfect, and this knowledge should lead us to be merciful to the imperfections of our fellows."

"You argue well, Mrs. Simcoe. But I never *have* tried to help one I thought deserving, but I found that I was, as the saying is, 'played.' Gave ten dollars once to make up a subscription for a chap that was knocked over by a blast. We made up \$250 for him and he kept the money, never paid his doctor a cent but gambled it all away. The sports had a fine time with our money. It's such things as that, that I've seen happen more than once, that sours me."

"No doubt, but there are some who are ungrateful, but that should not deter us from following a humane impulse. Let me tell you some of those whom we desire to aid. There are, let me see, first, the colored family at the Bend."

"Let the colored people help them!" interjected Mr. Billings.

"Then there is Joe Simpson's folks. Joe, you know, has been laid up with a broken arm. Six little ones who were and are dependent upon his day wages for each mouthful they eat."

"People that have nothing ahead to feed children should not marry," replied Mr. Billings.

"But here is one case, Mr. Billings, which should command your sympathy, if no other does. Mrs. Battams and her children, whose husband and father was killed in your own claim."

"Ladies," said Mr. Billings, slowly and deliberately, "I remember the morning Tom Battams came to me for work, as well as though it were this morning. He asked for work, and I told him, 'Yes, but the bank is mighty treacherous.' 'Can't help it, boss,' says Tom; 'the babies must have shoes.' And when Tom Battams went into the claim to work he took his life in his hands, for the extra wages I paid him. And now you think I ought to feed his young ones. If I listened to what you soft-hearted women style the 'calls of charity,' it might not be long before I became an object of charity myself."

It was evident that the ladies gave Mr. Billings' case up as a hopeless one, for they said no more upon the subject, and soon afterward took their leave. Cyrus felt relieved when they had gone, though he didn't like to admit it—even to himself.

The short December day was drawing to a close, and Cyrus resumed his interrupted readings. But, somehow, its subject no longer interested him. Despite himself, his mind would wander back a time when, in the old Western homestead, he had heard his father telling of the first years of his married life. "When we fust spliced," the old man said, "Becky an' I had nothin' but a feather bed, a cow an' a few cookin' fixin's. I'd work two days for Bob Henton, an' then he'd come with his oxens

an' plough a day for me. That was the fust year an' I only had ploughin' done for a little garden sass. Next year I had my own oxens an' I raised some wheat to sell. Becky had chickens an' we sold some eggs. But we got along an' allus had each other." He thought of the happy home he had been in childhood, and wondered how he could have told the ladies, "that people who have nothing should not get married." But his thoughts had come too late. His book did not interest him now and he changed it for another from the well-filled shelves of his library, and, turning over the pages listlessly, saw that he had taken down a volume of Dickens (that master delineator of the human passions), which contained the beautiful story of "Christmas Carol." It was a story he had read and re-read in former years, finding some new beauty in it each time, but today he felt no disposition to glance at its pages, each word of which he felt would be a rebuke.

The surging of the storm without began again, and Cyrus replenishing his fire prepared his solitary meal. By the time it was eaten and washed down with a glass of generous wine, night had fallen. But Cyrus did not light his lamp, and still sat at his place at table, communing with his thoughts. Away back they went again, to the time when, strong in the energy and hope of youth and



"You have come, Mildred, come at last. How many years I have wished for your coming." (See page 147.)

health, with the promise of a happy, happy future before him, he was not the selfish, grasping man he was today. He felt his lonely lot a hard one, and rebelled at the decree of Divine Wisdom which made it so. He bowed his head in the gathering darkness and, resting it upon his hand, pursued the train of thought which clung to him.

Suddenly the embers in the fire-place leaped into flame and his cabin became as light as day. He raised his eyes, and seated opposite him was the form of her so often in his thoughts. Strange to say, he was neither surprised nor the victim of superstitious dread. He knew that the same storm which raged at his door was beating on her grave, yet the only thought which came into his mind was one of wonder that she had entered the house without him being aware of it.

"You have come, Mildred," said Cyrus. "Come at last. How many years I have wished for your coming. Why have you come now?"

"For you, Cyrus."

"I am ready to go. The world has had little for me since you were taken away from it."

She looked at him with a grave, sad smile.

"The world, Cyrus, is as one makes it for himself. Yours has not been a pleasant one, but why?"

"Why? Because, when on the threshold of manhood, my hopes were blasted, and Time, which

heals the wounds of others brought no consolation to me."

She made no answer to this, but rising beckoned him to go with her, and together they passed out of the door which opened of its own volition at their approach. And, when they had crossed the threshold they seemed to have left the cabin far behind them. Cyrus looked to the right, where the lights of the little village at the base of Central Hill should have appeared at this hour, but all was darkness there. Above their heads was a leaden sky with threatening clouds moving slowly in the direction they were walking. Soon they came to a straggling row of houses, built of logs or shakes, reminding Cyrus of the looks of Central Hill village when first builded.

They stepped up to one of these and, looking through the dirty window, saw a lot of men seated at a table gaming. But though the game went on without ceasing, none of the players seemed to derive any pleasure. Indeed, it appeared that instead of playing to win, each was playing to lose and the winner each time reached for the money as though compelled to, and with a reluctant hand.

They passed onward and soon came to another house, where an old man sat surrounded by bags of money. Some of the sacks were labeled "doubloons," some "eagles," while others bore the mark

of the foreign silver coins which were so current in the land at an early day. Ever and anon a servant or a clerk would enter bringing more money, but the receipt of the treasure brought no pleasure to the recipient. Yet he took it as handed him and with a pained look put it into the sacks containing its kind, and turned, as if loathing it, away.

Many other houses they looked into, in each of which the occupant was doomed relentlessly to follow the selfish occupation he had pursued on earth. Butchers, who stole and killed their neighbor's cattle, merchants, who cheated in weight, lawyers, who studied their books to get "points" by means of which they hoped to rob the widow or orphan of their inheritance on some quibble, doctors, who preyed upon suffering humanity, that their purses might be lengthened, all, and others were seen. But at last the long straggling street came to an end and they halted.

"Were any of those you saw of a type with yourself, Cyrus?"

"Do you mean the man with the money?" asked Cyrus, in a husky voice.

"It is well. When one knows his fault he is already on the road to repentance. In life that man cared only for gain. Wealth flowed to him from every quarter, and the more he acquired, the more grasping and covetous did he become. Now, each

coin that comes to him is a curse, yet it is his punishment that he must continue to amass, as though his salvation depended upon it."

"And must he thus continue forever?"

"God is merciful and God is just. Would it be the part of either justice or mercy to punish for an eternity the sins of time?"

Cyrus turned to look back over the route they had traversed, and when he turned again to his companion the landscape was changed. The air was soft and balmy as in spring time, the leaden, heavy clouds which had accompanied them on this journey thus far had given place to a blue and smiling sky, while the notes of bird and the chirping of cheerful insect life filled the air. As they went forward on their resumed journey he saw that they were in a country of happy people, as from time to time they met with those who invariably greeted them with a pleasant smile.

As they passed along through the streets of a beautiful city, Cyrus was surprised at hearing his own name called. He turned in the direction of the voice and a little girl grasped his hand and welcomed him.

"I don't remember you, my little friend," said Cyrus.

"But I do you, and did the moment I saw you. Don't you remember George Martin's little girl, that was sick so long?"

"George Martin. Yes, I do; but that was many years ago."

"When I was so sick I could not get up you came in with papa one day. You seemed so sorry for me, and when you went away sent me a doll with curly hair and eyes that opened and shut."

"I remember now," said Cyrus, his heart beating with pleasure at the thought of the little one's grateful remembrance. "But that was only a trifle."

"Yet if you could have seen the many hours of pleasure that trifle gave me, you would have been rewarded. And when I came away Dollie came with me."

If Mr. Billings experienced one tithe the feeling of pleasure at the moment he gave George Martin's sick child the little gift which had proven such a treasure to her, as he did now at the recollections of it, our only wonder is that he did not keep on fruitful in good works to the end. But he had not, for the very next person he saw made his heart shrink with regret at the lost opportunities, gone never to return.

It was Tom Battams. Tom, whose tragic death and suffering family had been the subject of con-

versation but that very day. Tom, whose claim upon his abundance had seemed so strong to the ladies that they had brought it to his mind with a confidence that should have been justified by success. But the appeal had been vain.

"If my life was to live over again, Mildred, I should be a different man. But it is now too late."

"Too late, perhaps, for the days that are passed, but not too late for those that are yet to come. But time passes—I cannot have you with me long."

Many places in the beautiful city they visited and at each turn they took they met the form of some one whom Cyrus had known in the past ere he or she had crossed the dark river. All looked at them with pleasant looks of welcome, and no words of reproach fell from the lips of any, though again and again they would come unbidden to the man's heart. They retraced their steps to the point where they had seen the little girl, when Mildred spoke:

"We must now part, Cyrus, let me hope for a brief time only. One last word before you return. Here we are free from the curse of the world—selfishness. We leave that behind when we put off the mortal form and rise to a higher sphere. We cannot return to the scenes of earth life to counsel and advise the loved ones we leave behind, but we know of their deeds and pray for their hap-

piness. It is written that it 'is not good for man to be alone, and that woman was created for the companion of man.' The heart-strings may be strained in the agonies of sorrow, but with the passage of Time should come soft, sad memories, and resignation to the will of Omnipotence. Man can cherish the memory of and do his duty by the dead, and yet love and do his duty by the living."

* * * * *

Mr. Billings slowly raised his head from the table on which it had lain and for a moment was bewildered. He did not know whether he was at home in his own cabin, or still in the shadow land of his dream. The fire had again burned low, and the few embers remaining sent forth a dim, flickering, uncertain light.

He looked across the table more than half expecting to see Mildred sitting in the place where it still seemed she must be, but the uncertain light revealed nothing save the background of the cupboard from which he had taken the materials for his supper.

The rain had ceased again and a glance through the window revealed the sight of a few stars struggling through the obscurity of the sky. Cyrus rose and throwing a few light sticks upon the embers soon had the room lighted with a cheerful glow.

"Oh, Mildred, Mildred," he exclaimed, looking toward the spot again where she had been seated. "Often and again have I wished you could come to me in my dreams. Why, oh why did you not come before?"

His soliloquy was cut short by the sound of an approaching footstep. It came up to the door and after a little hesitation there was a timid rap. Cyrus opened the door, and saw one of the hands usually employed in the claim standing outside.

"Come in Sam," said Cyrus. Sam entered and waited uneasily until bidden to take a seat.

"Ditch broke?" asked Cyrus.

"No, the ditch is all right. Jim went up and opened the waste gates yesterday. I went over the line myself this afternoon. There was a little slide at Pigeon Point, but it is all shoveled out now, and there is no danger."

Mr. Billings' mind being thus relieved on this subject (for he had some misgivings as to the safety of his water way), he sat rather impatiently for Sam's business to be made known. But that gentleman seemed to be in no hurry.

"I was just getting ready to go to the store, Sam," said Cyrus, at length. "Is there anything you want to tell me of?"

"Yes, Mr. Billings. I thought I would come and see if you would do me a little favor—if you

can. You know last season was pretty short and I didn't get in a great deal of time. It's been a bad time for getting odd jobs about the Hill this summer, and the grass has been pretty short at our house. Wife was saying today, that if we could only get some shoes for the children, with some cheap playthings, it would be so nice for them Christmas. I didn't tell her I was coming here, but I thought that now that water had come and I could begin work soon as the ditch banks were settled, maybe you'd advance me a few dollars."

Sam delivered himself of this request in a hesitating way, and it was tolerably certain from his manner that he expected a refusal. And, indeed, it would be only in consonance with Cyrus' manner of doing business if his surmise should prove correct, for Mr. Billings had a theory, founded upon strict business principles, that a "good paymaster paid when the work was done," etc.

"How much will you want, Sam?" inquired Cyrus.

"I thought maybe you could spare ten dollars," said Sam, scarcely believing his own ears. "If you can't we'll have to get along with less."

Mr. Billings drew forth his purse and deposited a coin in Sam's outstretched hand.

"Why, Mr. Billings, you have made a mistake; this is a twenty and I have no change."

"So it is," said Cyrus, looking at it as if he now saw it for the first time. "Well, I've nothing smaller, and you can work out twenty as well as ten. It starts in for a good season and I ain't afraid but you'll be on hand. Now, if that's all, I'll ask you to excuse me, for I want to go to the store tonight."

The two left the cabin and proceeded down to the collection of houses called the "burg," where they parted company, Sam hastening home to communicate the good tidings to his wife, while Cyrus bent his steps to the store. The weather was not propitious for the assemblage of "stove sharps," and there were, consequently, not many idlers at that place when he entered. He was received with the deference due to a successful mine owner, from whom business favors had been received in the past and from whom it was reasonable to suppose more would be received in the future, so when he stepped up to one of the urbane proprietors and expressed his desire for that gentleman to take down an "order," his wish was complied with with commendable alacrity.

"Put down a couple of hundred of flour, to begin with," said Cyrus.

"Two hundred of flour. Anything else?"

"A barrel of sugar and box of tea."

"Sugar and tea."

"A couple of sacks of something for chicken feed."

"Two sacks of wheat. Anything else?"

"You might put in some bacon, some rice and some dried fruit, I guess. That's all."

"Thank you, Mr. Billings. Our mules will be quite busy tomorrow as the day after, you know, will be Christmas. Will you want it right away?"

"Tomorrow if you please. And see here," added Cyrus, bending over the counter, "I'd like to have you take the stuff up and leave it at the Widow Battams."

"Certainly, certainly," said the storekeeper, with a pleased expression. "It shall be done as you wish and there is not a thing in the lot will come amiss I assure you. I think times have been pretty nippin' up there for quite a while."

Cyrus' next visit was to the blacksmith's home. Here he found, not only Mrs. Simcoe, but Miss Styles, the sister of his old partner, and who had been to his house with Mrs. Simcoe that day. As the last named lady was one with whom he had become acquainted only that day, he felt a trifle embarrassed.

But the ladies, notwithstanding the refusal they had received that day from him were very pleasant, for the prospects of a good season had opened the hearts and purses of those who had been called

upon, generally, and they were well satisfied with the total result of their labors. They awaited only the arrival of others of the committee before they decided upon the special uses to which the bounty they had should be put. Cyrus soon got an inkling of this and governed himself accordingly.

"I have thought better of what we talked of today, ladies, and have come to the conclusion that I ought to add a little to the list." And Cyrus laid \$20 on the table. "But I want to couple this with a condition."

The ladies looked at him with surprise. But at last Mrs. Simcoe asked: "What is the condition you refer to?"

"Well, this. Whatever you do for the Battams family, let it be something to wear. That's all."

While they were not as yet posted as to the reasons Mr. Billings had for coupling this condition with his gift, they felt that they must be potent and readily agreed to his request. Soon other members of the committee came and Cyrus was turned over to his old partner's sister for entertainment, she, being a recent arrival at the Hill, leaving the details to her co-workers. She must have been quite successful as an entertainer for though the deliberations of the committee were quite lengthy, the two found so much to talk about that it was not until all minor matters were agreed upon and the lady

visitors took their departure that Cyrus rose to go.

It was not long before the *quid nuncs* of Central Hill found ample food for conversation in the change which had come over Cy. Billings. Various causes were assigned therefore, the most generally accepted one being that it was because he desired to find favor in the eyes of Gertrude Styles, and there is good warrant for this belief, for his attentions to that lady soon became marked. However much this may have aided in changing him permanently it is not for us to hazard a guess, but if the aforesaid *quid nuncs* had known of the dream which came to him on that stormy December day, some, at least of them would not have been long in arriving at the true conclusion.

BILL'S LUCK

Of course he had been in love. That, however, was but a natural consequence to masculine humanity, for the male biped who passes the age of discretion without a touch of the tender passion would be an anomaly in human nature. And of course he had been loved in return, that is, if he had judged the feelings of the fair one correctly. That was *not* so natural I thought, for as I looked at "Unlucky Bill" while he was pouring his sorrows into my sympathizing ear, there didn't seem to be much that was very loveable bound up in the mud-stained garments that encased his manly form. Yet I ought to have accepted his belief implicitly, knowing that far more "ornery-looking" men than he were happy husbands and daddies, and that every "Jack has his Jill," if fate happens to throw them together.

Probably the fact of Bill having been so uniformly unfortunate that the sobriquet of "Unlucky" was generally and rightfully prefixed to his name, prejudiced my judgment. Probably I thought him too much out of luck to inspire a genuine attachment in any feminine breast. For what-

ever Bill turned his hand to seemed to turn against him. If he "wing-dammed," it was a safe bet that he would find that he had only drained a "pot hole," and no honest miner requires to be told that not one in a hundred of these places ever pay anything. If he sunk a shaft he would strike down on a high spur of bed-rock, without a ghost of a color to be found. If he bought into a claim that was paying well, the chances were that the "lead" would give out by the time he got his money back, leaving him minus for grub and gum boots. But Bill was generally hopeful to the last; at each failure, after some general objurgations of his "luck" he was ready to pitch in again. In his case, however, the old adage of the "long lane which has no turning" seemed at fault. How could such an unlucky devil hope to inspire genuine love?

But I never for a moment questioned but Bill had loved with all the ardor of his nature. He was just the kind of a chap to indulge in some hopeless passion—and not one either of the sickly kind which crops out with the first fuz on the upper lip. And I was equally prepared to believe that his heart's delight had "threwed him" when he failed to come back within the time which he had set for the limit of his stay. Poor Bill! His case was only one out of ten thousand in the same year.

" 'Tis said that absence conquers love," and the youths who sought fortune in the Golden State during its first years are ready to certify to its truth. And I don't know that I care to censure the delinquent fair ones either.

It was a bleak day, past the middle of December, when Unlucky Bill let me into this secret passage of his past history. What caused him to unbosom himself was this: I happened along by the tunnel he had been running into Coyote Flat just as he finished washing up his "drift dirt," which the rains now furnished him water to do. The tunnel added another to the list of Bill's failures at mining, though he felt hopeful that there was something "just ahead." After narrating his experiences in this tunnel Bill had branched out, giving me a retrospect of his experience with pick and pan, and wound up by assuring me that if he had had the least particle of "luck" at the proper time, he, too, might have been a benedict like myself. This aroused my curiosity, and I proceeded to "draw him out," wherein I met with great success.

"And would you b'lieve it," said Unlucky, in conclusion, "if she didn't go and marry the last chap I'd 'a thought of; a regular no-account that she wouldn't hardly talk to when I was thar."

"Girls take queer notions, sometimes, Bill; but I should have thought her being engaged to you

would have kept her from letting the fellow make up to her."

"Well, we weren't exactly engaged," said Bill, sheepishly. "You see I was sorter bashful, and hadn't quite axed her if it was all right. But then I'd took her everywhere, and got things for her, and I thought the thing was as good as settled, anyhow. Cuss the luck."

"Don't 'cuss' anything but yourself, Bill; if that's all you had to go on. I don't see as the girl was to blame. Maybe if you'd spoke out like you should it *would* have been all right. You can't expect a woman to take everything for granted, you know."

This was evidently a new light to Bill.

"Maybe you're right," he said. "I never thought of that. Cuss it."

"Well, you lost her, Bill, and it's hardly worth while asking how at this late day. But, take my advice. There's as good fish in the sea as were ever caught out of it. Get some one to fight the battles of life with you, instead of roughing it the way you do, and my word for it, you'll be better for it at the end of a year. Come down to the Christmas tree next week and I'll put you on the trail of a young widow that moved in last week, with a family already started for you."

"Widder be hanged!" growled Unlucky. "And children, too. How many is there of them?"

"Three, all girls."

"Well, do you see that tunnel? I made just six bits a day while running it, enough, I guess, to keep them little imps in shoes. Now wouldn't I be a sweet old chap for a widder?"

Unlucky Bill was so highly pleased at the thought of marrying on the daily income he had named, that he broke out into a hearty guffaw, the first symptom of returning spirits he had shown since the wash-up panned out so poorly. But in justice to that worthy I must say that his failures never kept him down long at a time, for he was one of the irrepressibles.

"Never mind the widow, Bill, I didn't think you would take seriously to the notion. But I do want you to come down, just to see how the little fellows will enjoy the fun; it'll do you good."

It was with some apparent reluctance that Mr. Shively gave me the required promise, but he did give it. And when Christmas eve was come, among the guests at the Mule City Hotel was Unlucky Bill.

If I had space I should like to describe the array of beauty there which graced the occasion, with an elaborate description of the toilettes of the ladies, but as the whole matter was duly reported in the

local paper at the time, I will refer my readers thereto for further particulars.

The extreme bashfulness of Mr. Shively kept him pretty well in the background and it was not until the presents from the tree were all distributed and the squeaking of the fiddles had been heard some time that I was able to catch sight of that worthy. He was then standing outside the door and making frantic efforts to attract my attentions. I went to him at once.

"Say, Jim, what woman's that in the speckled caliker dress?"

"That's the new widow I was telling you of. Come on, and I'll make you acquainted."

"No—no—no! Jim, this is the cussedest luck. Jim, that's her!"

"And who's 'her'?"

"Don't you know? Betsy Jane."

"And who the devil may Betsy Jane be?"

"The one I told you of. That's her surer than Scriptor, and Jim, I'm nearly pizoned to know what sent her up this way?"

The curiosity of my friend being a very laudible one I set myself to work to gratify it, and after confiding to my wife enough of Bill's history to awaken her interest (for women must have a why and wherefore for everything), I learned all that was necessary. The Widow Clyne had laid the

lamented gentleman of that name under the chaparral some eight calendar months previous, in the rival village of Dogtown. She had remained near the last resting place of the departed until grub was hard to get, when she removed to our flourishing city and was now ready to take in dressmaking. I also learned that the late Mr. Clyne had, during the last few years' tarry on earth, developed a weakness for gin cocktails, keno, and other innocent but expensive amusements, so that when finally he was borne out of his house he left but very little of this world's goods behind him in it; and that the widow had been compelled to do some pretty lively "scratching" to make everything come out just right.

"What did they git on the Christmas tree?" asked Bill, when I had communicated to him the information gathered from my affectionate spouse.

I was sorry to tell him that as the widow's circle of acquaintance was limited, the Christmas offerings to the Clyne family had been somewhat meagre.

"She shall have ten yards of the best linsey in the store for each of them gals," said Bill. "And just as nice a dress pattern for herself as can be found. Now, you go with me and pick 'em out. Fix up some yarn about their being left for the tree, and forgot till just now, can't you?"

Of course I could. We hunted up the store-keeper, made the required purchases and were back in no time, as we thought. But the widow had gathered up her brood and was gone.

"Just my luck," said Bill, when this fact was made known to him. "I might a knowed it. But I'm sot on her having them things tonight, if I have to break one of her winders."

He took a pencil and wrote on the thick brown paper, "From a friend." Then armed with the bundle we took our way to the widow's domicile. But that excellent lady having the cares and duties of the morrow before her mind had retired to rest and all was silent as a Quaker meeting, before the "spirit" begins to move.

"My old luck, again," growled Bill, as he took in the situation. "Never mind; there's more ways to kill a cat than choking with butter. If I can find her clothes line, I'll send this package down her chimbley."

"Be careful, old fellow! Some of these California widows keep a revolver close by, and they shoot mighty wild. Them things will keep till tomorrow."

Mr. Shively was too mad to listen to reason, and was lucky enough to find the desired clothes line. Having securely fastened one end to the bundle, he began to cautiously make his way up the sloping

woodshed towards the chimney. For once fortune seemed to favor him; the bundle was placed within the chimney and was being gently lowered—when there was a crash of falling timbers, two or three huge oaths, and Bill came limping out of the ruins just as a series of feminine shrieks broke on the silence of midnight.

"I've nearly broke my infernal leg," said he, rubbing the injured member. "Just my sweet-scented luck again. For mercy's sake, Jim, do try and stop that woman's yawp. She'll yell herself into conniption fits and have the town here in a minute more. Don't be skeered, Betsy Jane! Oh-h-h, darling, don't holler so!"

Whether from the tenderness of the adjuration, or because she had already screamed herself hoarse, the widow quieted down, and we made tracks. Unlucky Bill didn't show his face for the next three days, and when he did it was only with a fresh tale of trouble.

In the meanwhile, however, the widow had not been slow in her endeavors to find out the mystery of that broken shed roof, and thanks to the knack women have of getting at anything which concerns themselves, had not only learned who it was that had been so generous on that occasion, but had also gathered all the information in regard to Mr. Shively's antecedents that Aravesta (my adorable

wife) could pump out of me. And the result was that the juvenile Clynes were set on the watch, and my unlucky friend had not much more than set his foot into town when he received an intimation that his presence was desired at the widow's hospitable dwelling.

What transpired at the interview I did not learn at once, but as Bill lamented over the "bad streak" which kept him so "infernal poor," I judged that there had been a fresh kindling of the sacred passion in his manly heart. If this was the case, however, the second course of true love didn't appear to be running any more smoothly for my unlucky friend than the first had done. I was led to this sorrowful conclusion by Bill tramping in excitedly a day or two before New Year, with the most elongated visage I ever saw on a mortal. I knew at once that the details of some fresh misfortune were about to be rehearsed to me.

"Well, what is it, Bill?"

"Oh, the same infernal luck. Tunnels caved and I have got to start in from the front. It's too bad—just as I was getting good prospects, too."

"Can't you clean out the cave, timber up, and go on?"

"Daresn't try it, the ground's cracked all the way back. It must have been mighty loose overhead and Betsy Jane told me if I'd only said any-

thing, she'd a waited, oh—ever so long! But the jig's up now; for a while, any way."

"Well, Bill, it is pretty hard luck, but I wouldn't start in from the front again, if I were in your place. I'd put in a few boxes, turn on a head of water from Flap-jack Gulch and sluice back to your prospects. You'll be apt to make grub, any-way."

Bill said he would do it. I went up next morning and helped him set the boxes, and by night he had cleaned out an old ditch and had the water running through.

I did not see my friend again until New Year's night. Then he came into the store, where I was loafing, beckoned me to one side, and unfolding a roll of rags he carried in his hand, showed me a nice little pile of dust.

"What's this, Bill?"

"The best luck in the world, Jim, I'm cussed if it ain't. Turned off the water tonight, to see if I could see the color, and the boxes were just lousy. Gold all in the gravel, and I've been running under the lead all the time. I've got the best claim in the county and I'll marry Betsy Jane tomorrow. Have you to thank for it and you shall have a half-interest. Not in Betsy Jane—in the claim."

But why use up time and paper in describing the happiness which now came to these two long-sev-

ered hearts? Unlucky had struck it at last, and if you go to Mule City today you will hear some of the old residents speak of the former fabulous richness of Coyote Flat. The young Clyne damsels have grown up, married and gone from the maternal roof, but Bill's luck never left him from that happy New Year to this day.

THE FERRY

A bleak December day. Overhead the leaden clouds hung like a pall, moving slowly to the northward giving token of a continuance of the storm which had been raging for the three days past. It was near to the evening hour but the wight who, for any reason, had passed the day in slumber, could not have told from the sky whether it were the morning, noontide or evening hour, for there was no rift in the clouds which showed in what quarter the god of day lay.

The old ferryman stood under the little porch in front of his door watching the flood of the river. The ferry rope had been hauled taut and the boat hauled as far in shore as the descending road would permit and, besides being fastened to the rope, was made yet more secure by being lashed with a stout cord to a great cottonwood tree far up the bank. The brow of the old man was clouded like the sky above, and well it might be, for the flood was not yet at its height, yet the rushing current had risen until the rolling waves in mid-stream leaped up to within a terribly short distance of the rope. Already the channel was bearing down

great timbers from where the miners had built their wing dams the summer before, while at times, a lordly spruce, uprooted bodily, came floating down, and the tough, strong branches reaching above the surface had more than once tested the strength of the good rope stretching across the stream. And aside from the desire to see the destruction of his property, if it were to be destroyed, was the fascination which comes to us all when we see the forces of nature gather to sweep away the puny structures erected by man. How often have we felt that fascination when the flames started up and aided by its allied element, the air, move on to the destruction of some great city, when the proud edifices were, one after another leveled to the earth and in their places left naught but the blackened masses of granite and shapeless ribs of twisted steel which but the day before we thought could defy the combined forces of all the elements. So it was fascinating to gaze upon the flood of water as it rolled onward to mingle its turbid volume with the blue waves of the ocean.

The season so far had given promise of what the miners wanted—a “wet winter.” The fall rains had saturated the parched earth and covered the mountains around with a dazzling vesture of snow. Then had come this storm, cold at first, but growing warmer as it progressed, until the sodden snow,

yielding at last, turned each little gulch into a rivulet, and each swale into a ravine. And the river, already swollen beyond the high water-mark of former years, surged on.

"Father, father; don't stand there in the cold all day. You don't want to be sick again, do you?"

The speaker, who had opened the door behind him, here came out upon the little porch. She was a girl of seventeen or eighteen and while her form was that of the old ferryman, the blue eyes and golden locks, with her clear complexion and regular features showed that she had taken her beauty from her mother's side.

"Hardly, lass," said the old man, his stern features relaxing into a smile, as he looked upon the girl. "But I have been kept a prisoner so long indoors that it is pleasant to be out of doors once more. The rain seems to have quit for a little. I'll go over the road and see if the river has got up to Johnny's cabin yet."

He walked across the road and left the girl standing in the doorway. Across the road was a fence, forming part of the enclosure of a rich piece of bottom land where he had cultivated a little garden. Folding his arms on the fence he leaned forward upon them.

The cabin of "Johnny," whoever he might be, which was the apparent object of his solicitude,

was seen to be yet in place, though the seething waters had cut their way behind it. He turned to speak to the girl, but she had gone back into the house, and his eyes were turned in another direction. This was toward a little knoll, where a single white paling betokened a lone grave, that of the mother of his child. As he stood leaning there, thoughts of the past rushed to his mind, and for a time he became oblivious to the leaden sky, the swollen river and all else. A few drops of cold rain falling on his bare hands aroused him and he turned to go towards the house when the sound of approaching footsteps in the path above him, caused him to stop and look up.

The stranger whose arrival was thus heralded came down the path and the mud on his pants and boots, as well as the soaked condition of his hat and upper garments, showed that he had traveled some distance in the storm. In years he was young, not to exceed twenty-five, at most. He stopped as he came near the old man:

"Is this Gaunt's Ferry?"

"It is."

"Can you take me over, at once?"

The old man looked at him with undisguised astonishment. "What! Cross the river tonight! No, it cannot be done!"

"It's a matter of life or death to me. Take me over."

"It will be a matter of life or death, probably death to us both, to attempt to cross. No, I tell you."

"I will pay you the worth of your boat. Money is no object to me at this time." He thrust his hand into the side pocket of his coat and brought out a handful of black and gray sand and gold with two or three bright nuggets mixed in. The old man cast upon him a glance of suspicion.

"Money is an object to me. I have one to gain it for—to hoard it for."

He took a buckskin purse from his pocket and poured its contents into his hand. There was one of the octagonal "slugs" which passed as currency in those days. "Should you give me a hundred of those I would not take my boat out into the current tonight."

The young man turned sadly away. "Then I must make my way to some place where there are more people. How far from here is the nearest town?"

"There is the Third Crossing, three miles below," said the old man, in a more kindly tone. "But you are wet and weary. We do not keep travelers here, but I guess my girl can give you a bit and sup while you——"

He was interrupted by a loud shout of exultation coming from the trail above. Looking up they saw a half dozen men, making their way towards them.

"It's all the same now," said the young man. "They were closer after me than I thought. They would have shot me in cold blood while crossing."

"But why in God's name should they shoot at you at all? What have you done?"

"Defended my rights, that is all. One of their gang attacked me and I hurt him pretty bad. He may die. I hope not, for I want no man's blood on my conscience."

The old man went hastily into the house, but returned almost instantly. By this time the foremost of the party had reached where the young man was standing.

"Well, Mr. Sutherlin, you didn't get away as easy as you thought. Hoped to get to Hangtown, did you, where your friends could hide you? We may have a little hangtown of our own, which you won't like so well."

"I was not going to Hangtown, but to the county seat where I could find the sheriff and let him do what is right, and let justice be done."

"Very likely story! You'll get justice you won't like if Joe Davis passes in his checks. If there's a chance for him to get well, we'll let him say, but

you can't stay there any more. We want no claim-jumpers in our diggin's."

"That's his story, Mr. Gaunt; now hear mine. I took up a claim near these men where no signs of work was shown. I spent two months getting ready to work it, and no one said a word. When they found the claim was paying good, this man, Davis, came over and said the claim was his. I tried to reason with him but he would not be reasoned with. I had nearly finished panning out my week's work when he came. He grabbed the pan, then I hit him with a rock. I saw two of his friends coming and I just emptied the dust in this pocket and left. I was a stranger there and had no friend to help me. You see their plan—if Davis dies they'll get rid of me and take the claim themselves and if he lives, they'll kindly let me live, if I will go away, unless they think better to put me out of the way at once."

"Very well done, young feller. You'd make a good lawyer; you can tell so smooth a tale. But you're going back with us just the same. Now you can start back up that hill, and be quick about it."

"Not a step do I go. If you are going to murder me, do it here, and now."

"Who's talking about murder, fool? If we want to we'll lash you on a horse and you'll see how you'll like that."

The rest of the pursuing party had reached the foot of the hill, and it was clear that while he who had been spokesman thus far was leader of the party, it was equally clear that some of his followers dissented with him, now that other witnesses than their own crowd had turned up. So, when Mr. Gaunt spoke up, there was a marked attention manifested.

"Let's have no talk of murder, or violence, but it would be little less than downright murder to make that young man return over the same road he came. When he reached here he could hardly drag one foot after the other. Let him stay here tonight and in the morning we can take him to the officers."

"There's sense in what the old man says," said one of the footmen, who clearly had no relish for a night journey over the road they had just come. "Let's talk it over."

The pursuers went out by themselves and for a few minutes were engaged in an animated discussion. Sutherlin improved the opportunity thus afforded to place the ferryman in possession of all the facts relating to the trouble and was assured that he would not be left to the tender mercies of the wounded man's friends without an effort, at least, to prevent it.

The storm at this time was again raging furiously, and no doubt was a potent factor for the

crowd to arrive at the conclusion to which it came. The old man led the way into the house and, heaping fresh fuel upon the fire, turned to hear the result of their conference.

"We will stay here, as you propose, but where will we put that chap to keep him safe, and where will we sleep?"

"You can put him in my room and I will sleep on the lounge. One of your number can stay here and keep guard while the rest of you can sleep in the barn, where there is plenty of loose hay and horse blankets."

"Talk enough, if the room will keep him safe, old man. But a barn will be a cold place for a wet lot, like us."

"It is the only place I have, for we do not attempt to keep wayfarers. You can dry yourselves pretty well by such a fire as this while my girl is getting your supper."

The other speaker opened the door and took a look at the bedroom. It was simply furnished, having only a chair, table, bookcase and single bedstead in the corner. There was no mode of egress, except through the room where the fireplace was. The room was a side one, built out toward the river and being on the lower hillside was on posts and eight or ten feet from the ground. There was a window, of course.

"It's all right, boys," he said when he came back. "We'll have to drive a nail in the sash and that'll fix things."

Luckily it had been baking day with Helen, so that she soon had a meal of baked potatoes, bread, bacon and coffee in readiness for their unexpected guests. Humble though it might be called, the wearied crowd did it ample justice and returned to the comfort of the big fire-place.

They had provided themselves with oilcloth garments before starting out in the storm to the pursuit. Sutherlin was given the place nearest the fire, for his captors saw that he was in far worse shape than themselves, and with a spasm of generosity gave him the warmest seat. So that the night waned on till even the strongest of them felt the need of rest, when Sutherlin was ordered to go to bed, and did so, passing his yet moist garments out to be hung over the backs of chairs. A short conflag followed his departure, when it was agreed which one should act as guard, and, locking the door of the room securely, they left the prisoner to the care of the guard and followed the old ferryman to the barn, to provide for their own comfort. Soon the ferryman returned, and after exchanging a few words with the guard, drew off his muddy boots and lay down for such repose as was held in store for him. The fatigue of the

evening told on him, and soon his deep, regular breathing showed him to be in deep slumber.

The clock pointed to the hour of midnight when the door opened and Helen stood on the threshold. Light as was her footstep, it aroused the guard, who was nodding in the rocking chair. She took a look at her sleeping father, then raked the embers together and put on more fuel. The guard looked on in silence until she turned to leave the room, when he uttered a low "Hist," placed his finger on his lips for silence, and beckoned her to come toward him. Unwilling to offend him, she approached slowly until she was close to him and stopped.

"That your father?" he whispered.

"Yes, sir," she answered, wondering at his question.

"Take a bit of advice, gal. Don't let him go with us tomorrow as he talked of doing."

"Do you mean that those with you will do injury to him?"

"Never mind what I mean, only keep him at home. It may not be healthy for him to go. Now go."

The girl was as pale as death itself. "Tell me what you mean," she insisted.

"I've told you enough now. Take my advice; that is all I can say."

"I understand your meaning, I think, but I doubt if he will mind me. But I thank you all the same. Is there anything I can do to make you more comfortable?"

"No-o. Maybe yes, though. I'm powerful tuckered out and can hardly keep awake—is there any liquor in the house?"

"None, only what father keeps for medicine."

"Get me a drink of it, gal, and we're even. I've give you some advice. You give me the drink."

She turned and passed as if unwillingly through the door. Then returning she spread a great cloak over her father's sleeping form, and stood a moment to see if he would awake. Then she turned again and passed through the door, nodding to the guard as she did so. In the cupboard were two demijohns, from one of these she poured a potation into a teacup and busied herself a moment with it before she returned to the room. He took the offered libation and tasted it.

"It tastes bitter," he said.

"Father puts herbs in it. I told you he used it for medicine." He drank it down. "That'll brace me up, thank you. There's some one coming. You'd better git."

He was right, for scarce had the door closed on the retreating form of the young girl than the front

door opened and two of the party from the barn entered, and looked suspiciously around.

"What light was that we saw?" asked one.

"Light? Oh, yes; the girl was in here just now and covered the old chap better. I s'pose she's afraid he'll get cold."

The explanation did not seem to satisfy the inquirer, for he stepped to the door of the bedroom and held out his hand for the key. It was given him by the guard, and he opened the door and saw the form of Sutherlin on the bed in the corner, so he closed and relocked the door, and grumbling at having come on a fool's errand, hied back to his quarters in the barn.

For a time the glass of liquor seemed to have the bracing-up effect on the guard he had anticipated, but when its exhilarating effect began to wear off he felt a drowsiness fall upon him which he could not successfully combat and to which he finally succumbed. He had barely given the proof of sleep when the door softly opened again and Helen looked cautiously in. She had removed her shoes and gathering Sutherlin's clothes (now warm and dry), passed in front of the guard, who sat in the rocking chair, revolver in lap, and noiselessly turned the key in the lock. The firelight showed the captive partly raised in bed, for, as may be imagined, he had had little desire for sleep,

and his watchful senses were strained at the least sound. She laid them across the bed, leaned over and whispered: "Dress quickly and quietly; take your boots in your hand and follow me." He lost no time in obeying this unlooked-for command, and in an incredibly short time stood beside her in the room where he had eaten supper. She took him by the hand and led him through the darkness, until the cold air told him they were out of doors. The storm had ceased and here and there a few scattering bunches of stars lighted the darkness. At her command he drew on his foot-gear while she did the same, and then taking his hand again led him down an invisible path till he knew by the swish of the waves that they were at the river. There was a weird light on the surface of the water and he could see the ferryboat as it moved back and forth in the little bay. She had already unfastened the rope which held it to the big cottonwood.

"You must carry me to the boat," she whispered. "Then push it out of the shallow water and get on yourself."

"My God! Miss Gaunt, what are you intending to do?"

"To take you over the river."

"I will not allow you to imperil your life thus; I am out of their clutches now, thanks to you and can easily hide from them."

"Yes, and what will they say? That we connived at your escape and their vengeance will fall on my father. Go, if you wish; but I shall go over the river and arouse the neighbors on the other side, above the bend. Make your choice quickly, for the chickens are giving warning of daybreak."

He had no more to say, but lifted her in his arms and waded through the shallow water to the boat. Placing her upon it he pushed it toward the current until it had swung free and clear from the land and then climbed on board.

It took them some little time to loosen and uncoil the great guy rope, and convert what had been the bow of the boat into its stern. Meanwhile the glimmerings of approaching daylight began to show themselves in the east. Then came the haul upon the other guy, to turn the stern into the bow, but that, too, was accomplished at last and Sutherland, under her directions, began to pull on the rope to bring the boat where it would feel the strength of the current. Silently as they had tried to work, there was more or less noise, partly deadened by the wash of the river as it rushed through the rapids below, yet loud enough to be heard by one of the party who had awakened before the others.

He ran to the road and could scarcely believe the evidence of his own senses, as he saw the boat with its occupants working slowly to the center of the stream. With a wild yell to arouse the others, he rushed into the house and, seeing the open bedroom door, knew that their prey had escaped them. Bestowing a kick upon the still sleeping guard, he grabbed a rifle from where they had been stacked in the corner and, darting out of the door, fired at Sutherlin, who was still pulling at the rope. But the motion of the boat, the uncertain light, and his own excitement made his aim poor and the bullet sped harmlessly by.

"Down behind the gunwale! Down, I say!" screamed the girl. "They are all gathering with guns. Now they are running down to the water's edge. Down, I say!" she repeated, fairly pushing him to the bottom of the boat, where the thick gunwale was a shield no bullet of that day could penetrate.

But the boat had not yet reached that part of the stream where the current, striking slantingly against the side would force it rapidly along. A few more pulls on the rope would have placed it there. She advanced, steadying herself by the rope rail and reached for the ferry rope.

"Stop, gal!" came a voice from the crowd on the bank, which had now got down to the water's

edge. "I don't want to hurt a gal, but by the Eternal I'll do it. Boys, look and see if you can find a skiff and we'll bring that boat back yet. I'll draw a bead on that gal if she makes another move."

Two of the party started up the river, where she knew a small boat was moored. Her father, who had been awakened with the others and had followed them bare-foot to the river, turned and began as hastily as his years would permit, to ascend the hill.

Then her fortitude gave way. "My father, my father! Have I only placed you in greater danger than ever. Have you gone to get your weapons to fight that gang of ruffians to save me. The cowards! But I will thwart them yet."

In the leather shield nailed to one of the gun-wales was an ax. She sprang and seized it and with one blow severed the guy rope at the shore end of the boat. It swirled rapidly round and the impetus thus given carried the boat two or three yards farther into the stream, where the full force of the current was felt. The boat held now by the one pulley surged backward and forward, while the stout rope bent with the strain like the bow of an archer.

Before her intention could be divined by the wondering crowd on the shore, she sprang to the forward part of the boat and with another blow

of her ax, struck the forward guy, which parted with a sound which, to those on shore, was like the thunder of a cannon. The current whirled the boat away, while the watching spectators held up their hands and gave a cry of horror at the sight.

"Great Heavens, Miss Gaunt! You have thrown your life away to save that of a stranger whom you never saw before. Would to God I had not come on the boat!"

"Well, it's too late to repent now, and besides I am not as unselfish as you think. I took you on this boat to save my father from danger. If that gang of cowards could have butchered us all, no doubt they would have done it, but when you and I may turn up as witnesses against them, they will not dare to harm a hair of his head."

"You think then we have a chance to be saved?"

"Nay, that I cannot say, but the river will hardly be so merciless as those from whom we have escaped. Those rapids we have just passed could not have been passed a day ago; but you see we passed over as if the boat were only a feather. And now—but do you know what day it is today?"

"Yes, it's Sunday; I was cleaning up the boxes when the trouble began."

"Yes, it's Sunday; but that's not all. You are taking a boat ride with me on Christmas morning. Now, tell me your name, so I will know how to

address you. Mine's Helen; call me that. We must not be too formal while our enforced companionship lasts."

The young man looked at her with undisguised admiration. "Well, Helen, since that is what I am to call you, I have heard and read of heroines, but you are the first with whom I have been brought in contact. My name is George."

"Well, George, spare your compliments till a more fitting season. We are in no peril so long as the boat stays in the current. It is when it is thrown on shore, if so it be, that we must look out, and not get crushed or tangled in the debris. I know this river."

For want of better seats they had sat on the floor of the boat and were so earnest in their talk that they had taken little note of their progress. He raised himself up and looked at the shore. "You know this river, you say. It looks to me as if we were floating up stream."

She sprang up and gave a cry of delight. "So we are; we have been thrown into the big eddy and are saved. Take that board George, and go forward and paddle the boat to shore."

He did so, and in a little while the bow was so near that he could catch and pull the overhanging willows. In this way they moved slowly up stream, George pulling on the branches while Helen busied

herself in untwisting the strands of what was left of the guy rope. Soon they floated so near land that he jumped ashore with one of the strands and made the boat fast to an alder tree. The waves of the eddy made landing more difficult to her, but it was accomplished at last and they stood on the firm earth at the foot of the mountain side.

"I know this place," she said, "and we shall have a hard climb to get to the path above. But let us thank heaven, that on this day of days we have escaped all the perils which beset us."

She knelt on the shelly rock and George knelt beside her; then, following the way she pointed out, they went farther up the river and commenced the toilsome ascent. Clinging to a bush here, an overhanging rock there, they climbed slowly until the beaten path was before them. Then they rested for some time on the damp trunk of a fallen tree.

"Our ways part here," said Helen, rising. "You take the down river trail, which leads to your destination. I shall go up to the ferry and let father see that I am safe."

"But, Helen, I cannot go and leave you alone here. Is there no lady friend to whose house I can take you?"

"Not this side of the ferry. Above a little way the Senora Morena will give me welcome."

"Let me go at least with you to the ferry."

"You can do me no good and may do yourself harm. Now go."

He took her hand and raised it to his lips. "I want to thank you once more, but I have no words that can tell you my thoughts. Goodbye. You shall see me again and know me better than you do." He turned and they went apart. But the girl, now the excitement of the adventure was over, felt her strength giving way. She plodded wearily up the path, resting from time to time, and at last reached the goal she was seeking—the ferry. There was no one in sight, for the would-be lynch-ers had, as she prophesied, made a hasty departure, while her father, saddling one of his horses, had galloped down the river to trace the boat. His keen eye soon saw it, moored to the opposite shore, and assured of his daughter's safety, he rode slowly back. As he rode in front of his door, Helen stood up and waved her apron. When he saw it, he threw his hat in the air, and gave a yell of delight, which his daughter heard above the roar of the river. Then, motioning her destination, she went her way.

Two days afterward there was an odd chance meeting at the Third Crossing, three miles below. Sutherlin, with two of his sturdy friends and the sheriff of the county, to whom George had told

what had happened, and who thought the matter should be investigated all around, came down the hill from the west and signaled to the ferryman to come over. While they were waiting, Helen, accompanied by the Senora's eldest boy, came riding down from the east. When the ferry reached its landing, old man Gaunt was one of the passengers, and, rushing forward, clasped his daughter in his arms.

For a few minutes the heart of each was too full for utterance, while the others looked silently and sympathetically on.

"It's a poor home I've got to take you to, daughter," said the old man. "Our ferry is gone."

"Not so, Mr. Gaunt," said Sutherlin, coming forward and extending his hand, which each shook heartily. "You shall have another boat there soon as it can be built."

The old man smiled sadly. "It's not the loss of the boat alone. My garden, my barn, even the ferry site itself is a ruin. Only the house is left. We shall have to begin at the bottom of the ladder again, my girl."

"You'll find me ready to help you, father."

"I want something to say about this," said George. "I've got the best claim I ever had in California, and haven't a partner in it. You shall be my partner if you will."

"Consider that as settled, Mr. Gaunt," said the sheriff. "That's a good place to plant the foot of your ladder."

"I thank you for the offer, but I am not one of them who want something for nothing."

"Then buy in and pay as it comes out; we will let the sheriff say what a half interest is worth."

The old man shook his head. "There has been bad blood over that claim, and I don't want to buy a quarrel."

It seemed impossible to move him, and the only thing he would agree to was to go with the sheriff's party. They took the road by the way of the ferry, for Helen was to be left at home. When they got there, they saw that the ruin of the ferry was complete. A landslide had occurred above, and when the pent-up waters were let loose they had spread over the ferry garden, cutting a new channel through the soft, black loam, while where the still waters in which the ferry boat had moved a great wall of boulders had blocked the former stream. Leaving Helen the party went on to where the new diggings discovered the year before lay, and where the first incident of our story occurred.

There was no one at work in any of the mines. A horse stood at Joe Davis's door and the sheriff, who had an eye for a good horse, pronounced it

to be that of Dr. Wenshaw. He was right, for when the party drew near the door, Dr. Wenshaw came out.

"How's Joe?" asked the sheriff.

"All right, now."

"Can he talk?"

"Talk! If you'd hear him curse himself for a fool, you'd think so. Go in and see him."

The party entered the cottage where the redoubtable Joe sat in a chair, while the pseudo guard sat close by, probably in attendance on the invalid.

"Hallo, Joe! Rather a bad looking head on you," said the sheriff, who, being a good politician, knew the Christened name of all the old stand-bys.

"None worse than I deserve. Hallo, young fellow! You here, too! Hope you haven't come to take me off, for I'm in a bad fix for traveling just now. You learnt me that my cabeza is not as hard as a granite boulder, when you bounced one off'n it. Sarved me right, too."

"Then you admit Mr. Sutherlin here was in the right?"

"In course he was. I did have a notice on that claim onct, but Slocum axed me to be his pard, and I let the notice run out. Then this young fellow fixed it up, an' when I saw how much better it paid

than mine and Slocum's, I got hostile. I thought I'd run him off, but he didn't run worth a cuss."

"And where's Slocum?"

"He lit out sudden, you bet. He said he never meant to shoot at the gal; thought she'd skeer; but she didn't much. He's powerful afeared you'll get after him for that."

"Well, where's he gone?"

"Said he'd go to Salt Lake, but I guess he lied. He was so cut up the way the gal worked the crowd that he said he'd go where he could marry a hull lot of wimmen an' git revenge on the hull female sect."

The crowd laughed heartily at the absent Slocum's unique idea of vengeance. Good humor being in reign, a confab was entered into, with the result that George's ownership was confirmed. Mr. Gaunt bought in for \$1,000, to be paid "as it came out" and none of the would-be lynchers were to be prosecuted, except the irate Slocum, if he ever was found.

Willing hands turned to build an addition to George's cabin, suitable for its new occupants, and in a few days Mr. Gaunt and his daughter moved in. The claim did not belie its promise, and when the mining season was over the old man had paid the price he had set for him and had a nice purse full of shining metal for his own.

George's friends returned to their homes at the close of the mining season, and after a good rest the partners got the claim ready for the next season's work. The fall rains had set in ere this was finished, and they were returning home in triumph. Half way they met Helen coming to meet them, as she had often done. Just then the old man remembered he had left a pick behind and went back after it, discreetly leaving the young folks alone.

"Helen," he said, "yesterday you made the happiest man in the world by promising to be my wife. Make me happy again today, and tell me when it shall be."

"When what shall be?" she asked demurely.

"You little witch, you know what I mean. Our marriage."

"George. I hadn't thought about that. But you have been so considerate in everything, that I'll pray your mercy for a little time to think it over. But it strikes me now that it might be a good way to celebrate the anniversary of our boat ride, when we went over the rapids from the Ferry.

Leaves
From an Argonaut's
Note Book

PART II

“A little nonsense now and then
Is relished by the wisest men.”

SIMPSON'S THANKSGIVING

It was the misfortune of my friend Simpson that he was a bachelor. And getting to be an old bachelor, at that. I say it was his misfortune, because I happen to know it was not his fault, for to my knowledge he had made several efforts to get out of that most undesirable state. But although there are those who argue that there is a mate for every man in the world if he only looks in the right place, that every Jack has his Jill, my friend Simpson seemed to be a frightful example of the fact that there are exceptions to all rules, he being the exception in this particular case. He was tolerably good looking, had a fair stake "salted down" and was, withal, as good-natured a chap as you could want to see. But all these good qualities proved no recommendation to the hearts of the fair damsels of the flourishing mining camp of Rabbit Hill, and at last Jack Simpson gave up in despair and seemed to be reconciled to settle down to a quiet life of single blessedness.

My opinion of the matter was that Jack was rather too fastidious. Of course, when a man is looking for a life partner, he is a Muggins if he

bites at the first bait which is thrown him, and then, again, there are some points in the "eternal fitness of things" which ought not to be overlooked. So, when Jack made his last "break" after Old Snipkin's daughter, Betty, who, though taller than her mother, was only fifteen years old, I prophesied it would not be long before he would come to grief in that quarter also. And my head was level. When he mentioned the matter to Betty, she laughed as only a Pike County girl *can* laugh, and told him he had better wait until her mother became a widder and then try for her. This heartless allusion to the forty years of Mr. Simpson had a wonderful effect on him. He went to his cabin, on Whisky Ravine, discarded linen shirts and black cloth breeches, and for a year or two seemed to be perfectly oblivious of the fact that Nature had divided mankind into two sexes, and that there was such a thing as woman in existence.

But as the years rolled on, the memory of this last "snub" died away sufficiently so that Jack once more made his appearance in society. The fact was that Jack was really in love this time, and true love, like true merit, is always modest and hesitating. Once or more when in the presence of the charming little widow whose image held possession of his heart, he had been on the point of pouring forth the pent-up feelings of his bosom, but the

thoughts of the cruel rebuffs of former years checked the words upon his lips and the tale of his love remained untold. So it might have been for years had it not been for certain incidents which I now propose to relate in this most veracious history. I cannot say that the concealment of his feelings seemed to "prey on the damask cheek" of my friend, in fact, his cheek and also his nose assumed rather more of a damask tinge than had been their wont before he commenced to cherish his hidden love. Jim Smith said it was whisky that Jack was using for "nose paint," but Jim Smith was not reliable.

The charming little widow lived in a charming little cottage, near the junction of Whisky Ravine and Nugget Gulch, half a mile away from the lonely cabin of my friend Simpson. Often, when that gentleman passed the charming cottage on his way to the Hill, did the thought arise, how happy he could be if he were only the possessor of that cottage and its inmates, also. For the lamented Mr. Blyther left three images of himself to the care of his bereaved spouse and, in fact, it was through the instrumentality of one of these olive branches that the acquaintance of Mr. Simpson and the charming widow was brought about.

"What do they always have Thanksgiving Day in November for?" was the mental inquiry which

Mr. Simpson propounded to himself, as he stood in the door and watched the falling raindrops. The truth was, it had been a continuous storm for several days and Mr. Simpson's larder sadly needed replenishing. It had been his intention to replenish and at the same time take his dinner at the Rabbit Hill Hotel, but the storm discouraged him and after taking a last look at the clouded sky he reluctantly abandoned that idea and put on a fresh pot of beans. Having thus initiated culinary proceedings for the festival, Mr. Simpson took down the can in which he kept his yeast and stirring in some more flour, set it above the fireplace. This done, there was nothing more to do until the yeast got into working order, and Mr. Simpson, taking the last week's paper from the shelf, prepared to put in the interim to the best possible advantage.

The boiling and sputtering of the beanpot joined to a clear conscience, produced a soothing effect on the mind of Mr. Simpson and he was soon in the land of dreams. And probably there was no way in which he could have passed the time more happily. For, when a man is sound asleep he is out of misery. He does not care whether the diggings pay an ounce a day, or only grub, and it does not matter to him whether we are going to have a wet winter, or are threatened with a dry one; in truth, he is, for the time being, as free from

all sublunary ills as if he were the inhabitant of another planet. But with the awakening came a renewed sense of the sorrows of life, as Mr. Simpson found. As he opened his eyes he saw that there was a lull in the storm and the widow's boy had taken advantage of it to come in search of the family cow.

"Come in, Jeff," said Mr. Simpson, throwing open the door and poking the embers together under the bean-kettle. "Come in and see me. It is all-fired lonesome sitting here alone on a rainy day. What's the news, now?" he continued, as Jeff sidled up to the fireplace where he stood, scratching his head.

"There hain't nothin'," said Jeff, grinning.

"No news; why, what a boy you are, now. "Why, when I was a boy, I could always find plenty to tell and talk about," and Mr. Simpson, taking his bread pan poured it half full of flour.

"What be you goin' to do?" queried Jeff.

"Make some bread, my boy. Must have warm bread, you know, for a Thanksgiving dinner. Maybe you'll be an old bach some of these days and have to make bread." And Mr. Simpson took down the yeast can from over the fireplace and looked into it. Instantly a change came over his placid countenance and he gave vent to a number of

exclamations more remarkable for force than elegance.

I don't know that I blame Mr. Simpson for that little ebullition of temper. I felt the same way myself, when I found a drowned mouse in my sour dough. And I did just what Simpson did; took the can out of doors and kicked it out of sight.

"I'll have to go it on beans and cold bread, Jeff," said Mr. Simpson, when he recovered his equanimity. "Never mind; so long as a fellow has plenty of beans he is all right. I wonder how near they are done?"

It was an easy matter to find out as every old miner knows. Mr. Simpson took a long handled spoon and fishing up a few of the beans, blew vigorously on them. As the skins began to peel off and roll back a smile of triumphant gratification spread over his face and he got a fork to try the bacon.

Alas, it was the feather which broke the camel's back. For while Simpson was snoozing, the cross stick from which the pot of beans depended was quietly burning away. When Simpson reached in his hand to test the bacon, its weight on the fork was too much for the frail support and in another moment the bean pot stood bottom side up among the embers.

To yank it out with the aid of the fire stick was but the work of a moment, and in another it was rolling down the hill after the yeast can. Mr. Simpson apostrophised the departing vessel as it bumped against the rocks and it made him cheerful again.

"I've got to go to town for dinner, Jeff," said he, soon as he got the ashes out of his eyes. "I go right past your place and we'll go together."

But Jeff was gone. Though he had no news to tell Mr. Simpson he had plenty to tell his mother and was not going to lose any time telling it. So when Simpson got to the door and looked, the retreating form of Jeff was just disappearing around the bend, and the pleasant tinkle of the cow-bell told that boy and cow were making good time.

Mr. Simpson divested himself of his soiled apparel, donned his store clothes, and was soon on his way to fulfill his original intention of eating his Thanksgiving dinner at the Rabbit Hill Hotel. As it was even now past the hour when hotel guests dine he strode onward at a fearful pace. And, as he knew that the story of his misfortunes had ere this reached the ears of the charming widow, he jammed his hat fiercely down over his eyes and would not even look in the direction of the cottage. But he was not fated to escape.

"Mithter Thimpthon," piped a little shrill voice. It was that of the widow's little daughter, who was "lying in wait" for him. "Pleath, thir, mother thed you had loht your dinner and would you come and have dinner with her?"

My friend Simpson hesitated. If there is anything in the world a man hates, it is to appear ridiculous in the eyes of his soul's affection. That is, until he has got her secure. For it occurs to me that some men try to make themselves as ridiculous as possible in the eyes of their wives and generally make out to. But I, not being a benedict, may be prejudiced against the shortcomings of those of my sex who are better off than I. However, Simpson knew that he must face the widow on some occasion, or leave the county, so he determined to brave fate and marched right in.

But the gentle widow did not seem disposed to twit Jack with the slightest allusion to the misfortunes he had met. Maybe that, having had one experience with the animal, Man, she knew that a hungry one was not of the kind to stand joking. Be that as it may, the preparations for the devotional meal were hurried forward and the family and the guest were soon seated around the hospitable board.

It was not until the inner man (and woman) was satisfied that reserve was broken, and conver-

sation took a free range. Then she told Mr. Simpson of sundry passages in the bachelor life of the late lamented Blythers, which he had told her of after marriage and which the occurrences of the day had recalled to her recollection. The narration of these little incidents had a tendency to put Mr. Simpson at his ease, and the thought came into his mind that if the lamented Blythers had been recompensed for such sufferings by the love of the angelic creature who sat before him, why should not he, too, in the ever-changing chapter of events be recompensed in a similar manner.

"And so you lost your yeast," screamed the widow. "An' just the same way that Blythers lost his first batch of apple sass; only 'twas a wood rat got drowned in it. But he learned to keep things kivered after that."

"So do I, generally, Mrs. Blythers. But a fellow don't always think of such things. Now a woman, you see, always remem——"

"Ma said it serves you just right," interrupted Jeff, "she said if a man——," but here Jeff's revelations ended, for a vigorous slap of the widow's fair hand across the mouth checked the flow of Jeff's words and sent him howling to the woodshed.

"Well, you did, ma," said the next, undeterred by Jeff's fate, "you said if a man was fool enough

to keep bach when he ought to be mar—mar—oh, ma; o-u-c-h, oh-h.”

Mrs. Blythers, however, kept up a vigorous assault till both the remaining olive branches were in the woodshed with Jeff, while my friend Simpson, with a palpitating heart, sat blessing the “little pitchers” whose “big ears” had enabled them to make such precious revelations. When the fair widow returned and he caught sight of the blushing face he thought he had never seen her look so beautiful. “And on this hint he spake.” Taking within both his own the fair hand which had slapped Jeff’s mouth, he said, in soft, low tones:

“Anastasia, dearest, if I may call you so, can I believe my ears? Do you commiserate my lonely condition? And will you, oh, will you make it less so, by becoming my own sweet wife?”

“Drat them young ones,” answered the widow, “I s’pose I’ll have to say yes.”

Mr. Simpson and his amiable lady still live in the charming little cottage near the junction of Nugget Gulch and Whisky Ravine. He took an early opportunity of telling me the successful issue of his courtship, and wound up by saying that the loss of his pot of beans on that Thanksgiving Day had taught him to exclaim with the poet: “Sweet are the uses of adversity.”

STUBBS' WOOING

Samantha Jane was sweeping. As this was a portion of the daily routine of duties devolving upon that lady, it may seem that the information is uncalled for on our part. Every woman is presumed to sweep the house at least once a day, and why we should allude to it at all may seem superfluous.

But Samantha Jane was sweeping. Sweeping the porch. To the ordinary observer this would indicate that, having disposed of the other household cares, she was about ready to sit down and read, or sew, or devote herself to some other of the lighter occupations of femininity. But such a conclusion, although it might be one which would seem warranted by the facts would be far from correct. A peep into the interior of old man Stigger's presumably happy home, would show the breakfast dishes unwashed, the beds unmade, and even the sweeping itself confined to the exterior of the building.

Let us then enlighten the world as to the cause of this departure of Samantha Jane from all the ordinary rules of housekeeping. There was a man

in the case, of course. And while Samantha Jane was sweeping, his approaching form began to appear through the fog. For this was New Year's morning, and I have invariably observed that New Year's morning is foggy in a dry winter. The coming man was none other than my friend and partner, Mr. Peter Geiger, called, for shortness, I suppose, "Old Stubbs." Not that he was either old or stubby. but he was called that, as we always thought, on the principle that the boys called another fellow "deacon" because he played seven-up in the church once while waiting the arrival of the preacher.

Samantha Jane continued to sweep the porch, and the nearer Mr. Geiger approached the more vigorously she plied the broom. If this proceeding upon her part was intended to awaken the admiration of Stubbs, I very much doubt its expediency. The broom, for some purposes and the broomstick for others, are proverbially woman's weapon, and a thoughtful man seeing the nimble dexterity with which she handled the one, might well pause and consider if she could not, if occasion called for it be equally dexterous with the other. But Mr. Stubbs was not a thoughtful man. He reasoned (when he reasoned at all), from analogy alone. Therefore it is but justice to my old partner to say that when his eyes rested upon the

lithe, active form of the maiden, his thoughts dwelt only in the present.

Samantha Jane continued to sweep, apparently oblivious of the existence of anything in this wide world except the dust she was driving before her. But while her form moved in sympathy with the motion of the broomstick, a close observer could have noted that her eyes were cast furtively upon the masculine specimen which drew nearer and nearer. As for my friend Geiger, or Stubbs, if you choose to call him, although he had not expected this happy meeting, he was not unprepared for it. So when he reached that point in the path nearest to the domicile of the venerable Stigger, he paused and saluted.

“‘Mornin’.”

Samantha Jane quit sweeping with a start and a little feminine yell. What deceivers women are. She knew this was Stubbs' ordinary mode of giving the morning salutation. But it did not suit her purpose to seem to be expecting anything, hence the start and the yell alluded to above.

“Lawk, Mr. Geiger, how you frightened me!”

“It's enough to skeer any good looking creeture, I expect,” assented Geiger. “But now you've got over it, how are you?”

“Nicely, Mr. Geiger, won't you drop in and see the folks?”

"I see 'em all I care about seein' just now," gallantly replied Stubbs. "Fact is, I'm in suthin' of a hurry. The boys are layin' off today, bein' its New Year, and I was just goin' to the burg to get some little traps to help 'em out."

"I s'pose you'll be at the party, tonight?" questioned Samantha Jane.

"What, is there to be a party? This is the first I've hearn of it."

"Why, do tell now! And you hadn't heard. Why it's this way, you see. Mrs. Willet's cousin, what came here last week, said it was a shame that a New Year's should pass and no doin's. And so they're goin' to have a time at the hall."

"Glad to hear it," said Mr. Stubbs. "You'll be thar, of course?"

"Wall, I don't know. Mebbe so."

What could Mr. Geiger do? What would you do my young masculine friend, if a buxom, blooming Missouri girl made a similar revelation to you? Mr. Geiger took in the situation at a glance. He saw that he was in for it, and if I must tell the truth, I think he was glad of it. So he did the only thing possible for a young man in his situation to do gracefully, and asked permission to escort Samantha Jane to the party, then and there. And right then and there Samantha Jane accepted the invitation.

Having accomplished this little piece of business to their mutual satisfaction, Mr. Peter Geiger continued on his journey toward the "burg," while Samantha Jane resumed sweeping. It struck me as a little odd that although more than half of the porch was yet unswept at the time of Peter's departure, the young lady finished it up in about one-tenth part of the time it had taken her to do the other, and hurried shivering into the house. From which I infer that the whole movement was a piece of strategy upon the part of the guileless maiden.

The "hall" of which Samantha Jane had made mention in the interesting dialogue we have so truthfully reported, had originally been a whisky saloon, but the proprietor thereof, after trouble with some of his customers in regard to the payment for certain drinks (which ended in his being knocked down with one of his own bottles), became a staunch temperance man, and instead of selling out the business, left the flourishing burg of Breakneck Point in disgust. It had thereupon been taken possession of and was used for public purposes generally, from a traveling minstrel show up. Here, when the blushing and blooming Samantha Jane arrived under the escort of my stalwart friend Stubbs, there were gathered all the young ladies and little girls from miles around, and we may as well tell it all, the old women also. Now we are

not going to write a homily on old women dancing, in forgetfulness of the maxims of church discipline, impressed upon their minds in another country. We believe it a sort of duty which all hands owe to society, to turn out on such occasions as this, and contribute their mite to the general comfort and happiness of the community. *Verbum sap.*

Therefore, we must not be surprised to learn that old man Stigger and his estimable lady soon followed Stubbs and Samantha Jane, having very discreetly dropped behind after starting, which action on their part we submit is worthy of all praise. We know of more than one lady of a certain age, past the barriers of girlhood, who might have been happily married years ago, if the old folks had only sense enough to keep out of the way. Our experience is that it is all well enough to have the goodwill of the old folks to start in with, but when it comes to substantial sparking, third parties are to be kept away.

The orchestra consisted of two fiddles and a banjo, and three babies. "Fancy" dances were few and far between, for as yet the teachers of "the poetry of motion" had not reached that point, and as a natural consequence the only dances which the guests dare essay, were the old-fashioned ones they had learned in "the States." And good dances they were, too, if we do say it. We wish they

would revive them now, in place of some we wot of. My friend Stubbs was in his element. Holding the fair hand of Samantha Jane within his own, together they threaded the mazes of the Money Musk, or met and parted in the indescribable chain of the Haymaker. At the conclusion of the latter the fate of Mr. Geiger was sealed. A girl who could handle both hands and feet so capably as Samantha Jane had shown her ability to do, was the girl to share his heart and cabin on Scorpion Bar. And with that energy which characterized all his actions he determined to seal the bargain that very night.

The dance came to an end after a while, as everything in this world, and the world itself must, if we are to believe what is told us. And as everything dies, and passes away it is only reasonable to conclude that the world must share the universal fate of all animated nature, when it has filled its appointed purpose, so we will not attack the philosophy of sages and revelation on that point. But let it not be understood that the dance at Breakneck Point ceased at what would be termed fashionable hours. It was not until after "sun-up" that the last dulcet strains of the fiddles were heard and the revelers took their ways homeward. In those golden days people who went to a dance went there to dance, and dance they did. And it is a pleasant

fact for me to chronicle that old Stigger, with that wise discretion we have heretofore had occasion to commend, departed with his better half and the olive branches a full half hour before Samantha Jane and her admiring partner could tear themselves from the festive scene.

It was before the days of wagon roads and the narrow trail along the hill side left them but little opportunity to walk side by side. This was annoying, as all our readers who have been married or in love will readily admit, but as we before remarked it is only within our province to deal with facts. Stubbs felt that the wished-for opportunity would soon be gone, and though he had felt full of courage when he formed the resolution of knowing his fate, as the decisive moments were passing he felt his courage vanish, notwithstanding he had taken a couple of good snifters of whisky to loosen his tongue. It was not until they were descending to Sucker Flat and the domicile of old Stigger, with the smoke curling upward in gay festoons through the crisp January air, appeared in sight, impressing the mind with a sense of the domestic happiness which was to be found therein, that he found courage to declare his love. And perhaps he would not then had it not been for Samantha Jane.

"You'll stop till arter breakfast, Mr. Geiger, will you not? A cup of coffee will do you good. I'll make one in no time."

Then his pent-up feelings found vent, Fanny Fern, or some other woman cynic has put it on paper that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. Thus it was with my valued partner.

"Stop," he repeated, "of course I'll stop. But, oh, Samantha, dearest, let it not be the only cup of coffee you make for me. Make coffee for me so long as we both do live."

"Lawk, Mr. Geiger, how you surprise me. This is so unexpected——"

"Never mind, I mean it as much as if we'd bin courtin' a coon's age. Here I stop, and I won't go a step farther till you promise to be my own."

"Come along then, Peter. You'd freeze to death if you stayed here long this morning, and I don't want your death on my conscience."

The loving pair linked arms and moved toward the house till a big manzanita bush hid them from view. Here they stopped and Stubbs ratified the contract upon her ruby lips. He must have been very much in earnest, for old Stigger, who was picking up chips to replenish the fire, went in and told his wife that the weather must be moderating as he could hear the ice down in the bend cracking and breaking up.

Having then detailed the wooing of the gallant Stubbs my mission as a chronicler would seem to be ended. But that reverence for truth which has guided my pen thus far impels me to add yet a few words. Mr. and Mrs. Geiger after marriage established their home near the claim, and the uniform friendship which had existed between us during Peter's years of bachelor life, when we cabined together and took "week about" with the cooking, was not weakened by the new relation he had assumed. But when I look upon the half dozen or more of tow-headed young ones that Pete has to feed, clothe and keep shod on three dollars a day with work only for part of the season, I rather feel glad that it was he and not I that found Samantha Jane sweeping on that memorable New Year's morning.

THE END OF LEAP YEAR

Mr. Swipes hastened through the rain until he reached his cabin on Gouge-Eye Point. Naturally, one would not think an old, shell-back miner like Swipes, who had stood the storms of a quarter of a century, would care for a little rain, that being, as the old women used to say, neither sugar nor salt, he could stand the storm of any winter, and welcome it as a guarantee of that desideratum of every mining community—a wet winter, and plenty of water. It may be, however, that it was because he *had* stood the storms of so many winters in the past, that the amiable Mr. Swipes felt himself admonished to keep a keen lookout for his own health in the future. At any rate, having gone into the diggings in the morning under a cloudless sky, he, having omitted the precaution of taking with him a gum coat, was caught by the storm at a great disadvantage. And, like the prudent man he was, he “streaked it” for home.

Of course he reached there without any mishap, for it was not the first time he had darted home “between drops.” A glance at the sky told him that the storm was probably good for the rest of the

day, and as matters were not pressing in the claim, he prepared to make himself comfortable. From his store of pitchwood a few splinters were selected, the dry pine kindling put over them, and drawing a match from the bunch he struck it to kindle a fire. But, as he bent down in pursuit of this laudable purpose, the water which had collected on his hat-brim poured off in a little stream and extinguished it. It was a little thing, but life is sometimes made up of trifles. Mr. Swipes swore—actually swore over this little mishap. Having thus relieved his feelings, he essayed to strike another match, but found to his discomfiture that the bunch had collected dampness and the heads scraped off in a manner peculiarly aggravating to a chilly man. At each successive failure, Mr. Swipes swore again, but it did no good, and the prospect of a cheerful fire to dispel the dampness of his cabin seemed very slim indeed.

“This comes of baching it,” growled Mr. Swipes. “If I had a woman to keep house for me I wouldn’t be shivering this way, now. Doggone it, why ain’t I married?”

Mr. Swipes scratched his head as he propounded this conundrum to himself, but failed to elicit any response. Then he began exploring his pockets in the hope of finding a stub, but was equally unsuccessful. It was rather a discouraging thought that

he would have to go a half mile to the nearest neighbors to get matches to kindle his fire, but there was no getting over it and grabbing the hat which had caused the mishap, he was about to open the door when there was a light tap on it. Now, it was not usual for any of Mr. Swipes' visitors to announce their presence in this manner. Generally, the door opened and they came bulging in, or if they knocked at all, it was in a manner which gave unmistakable evidence of somebody's presence. This light tap discomposed Swipes more than a salvo of artillery would have done, and he hesitated before opening the door. And well he might.

For there, upon the threshold stood three specimen's of "God's last, best gift to man." That they were not able to stand the storm like young ducks was evidenced by their forlorn appearance, and the haste with which they bolted into the cabin at Mr. Swipes' invitation was ample proof.

"How glad we were to see you come home, Mr. Swipes. We were under the big pine, but you see we couldn't keep dry. Why in the world don't you start your fire, now you've got everything all ready? Don't you see we are almost froze?"

He did see it. But that did not help matters a bit and he was forced to the humiliating confession that there was not a match in the house.

"Then Jane shall give you one. She had some awhile ago. Don't pretend to deny it, now, you *do* smoke and you know it."

Whether Jane, whom Mr. Swipes had not before seen, she being a recent arrival in the place, intended to deny the fact, or not, we are not prepared to say, but after several preliminary motions, she began to search the pocket of her dress. From thence she drew forth a ball of blue yarn, a knife, a bunch of keys, several newspaper clippings of poetry, which she read carefully, then a few matches, wrapped in a bit of paper. Swipes took one of these and in a few minutes the cheerful blaze was rolling up the chimney, and the moist quartette gathering around it forgot the storm which was raging without.

"How came you women folks to be caught out in this way?" asked Mr. Swipes, when he had got sufficiently warmed up for conversation.

"Well, you see Jane here,—my aunt, Mr. Swipes,"—(Swipes bowed profoundly) "had never seen a hydraulic playing, and the morning looked so fine that we thought we would just walk up to the bar above. We didn't dream of a storm and never thought of taking umbrellas."

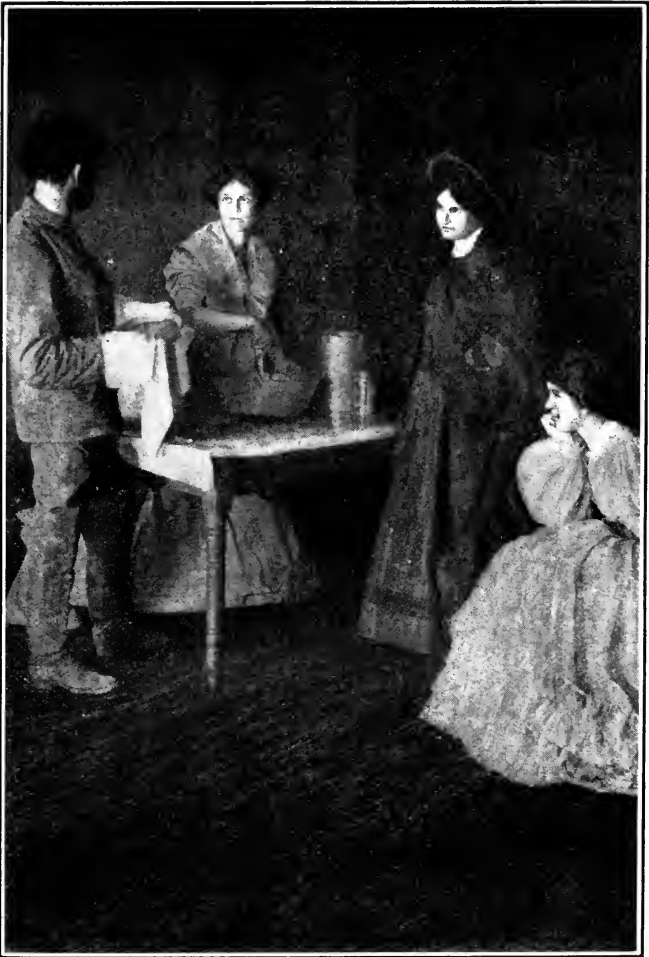
Mr. Swipes was entirely satisfied with that explanation. In fact, that gentleman was lapsing into

a state of mind in which he would be satisfied with anything.

Albeit rain is a most necessary adjunct to the prosperity of this glorious golden State, let the storms come when they may, there are some who will wish they had held off a little while longer. Not so with Mr. Swipes, who was delighted with his accession of company which the unlooked-for deluge had brought to his lonely cabin, but so it was with his visitors. For when, under the genial warmth of the fire they had got warm and dry again, came the wish that the rain would quit and let them go home. And numerous were the trips which were made from the fireplace to the window to note the appearance of the sky, or to see if some one was not on the road with umbrellas, to hunt them up and bring them home. But the humiliating truth must be told that old Bender, the only one who knew where they had gone, was so deeply interested in a little game of draw poker, that he quite forgot, not only that Mrs. Bender had gone up to the bar that morning, but was quite oblivious of the fact that he had a wife at all. But old Bender's weakness for draw poker and such kindred amusements was one which was shared by other benedicts of the burg, so he was not at all singular in his habits.

The hands of the clock began to indicate the near approach of that time of day when custom and nature require humanity to partake of the noontide meal, and Mr. Swipes, whose appetite was sharpened by an early and light breakfast, was at his wit's end to know on what to feed his unexpected guests. Now, if he had been given due notice of their coming, he could have prepared a meal fit for a king, but we have to concede that he was taken at a great disadvantage. An inspection of his larder showed the heel of a loaf, a small remnant of the boiled beef of the day before, and the remains of a pot of beans, ample, indeed, for the frugal meal which would have appeased Mr. Swipes, but only a taste for four. Added to this was the discouraging fact that he had but two plates and paraphernalia to match, one for himself and one for those State occasions when "Slim Jim," or some other of his husky cronies dropped in to have a square meal with him. And as these plates, etc., had not been in the dishpan since Slim Jim's visit the day before, (Mr. Swipes having washed his own plate sufficiently by the simple but ingenious process of turning it bottomside up), the difficulties of the situation will be seen at once.

But Swipes arose with the occasion. The dish-water was heated, poured into a pan and, armed with half a flour sack fastened with a nail to the



"I wish I had such a housekeeper for every day," said Mr. Swipes, gallantly. (See page 227.)

end of a stick, Swipes had those dishes washed in no time, before his guests knew what he was doing. But when, this task completed, he rubbed the inside of his dutch oven with a bacon rind and, pouring some flour into a pan reached for the box of yeast powder, their woman nature would permit them to remain silent no longer. So Mrs. Bender asked him what he was going to do.

"Why, get you folk some dinner, of course."

"Not much, you ain't, Swipsey." (This was Mrs. Bender's familiar way.) "It's a shame you haven't got a wife to do all these things for you, but as you haven't we'll be your housekeepers for today." And before Swipes fairly knew it, she had the pan from him and with sleeves tucked up (a form of procedure Mr. Swipes had never thought of), was stirring up the flour.

"I wish I had such a housekeeper for every day," said Mr. Swipes, gallantly.

"It's your fault that you haven't," retorted that lady. "Why don't you get married, as every man ought to, instead of moping thro' life like a great dunce—as you are?"

It is a coincidence which will be remarked, that this was the identical question Swipes had propounded to himself just before the ladies made their appearance. But there was this difference: That Swipes, talking to Swipes, could leave

Swipes' question unanswered, but when it was asked by a female, there must be a reply forthcoming. So he answered very promptly: "Because no one would have me, Mrs. Bender."

Mrs. Bender only responded, "Git," and went on with the kneading.

"Git?" retorted Swipes, indignantly. "Now it's so. D'ye s'pose I'd stay single long, if I thought a right good woman would say the right word? I've kinder waited through Leap Year, to see if some one of 'em wouldn't shin up to me, but it's near gone now, and nary one has 'cheeped.' "

"Jane," said Mrs. Bender, solemnly; "did you hear that?"

"Hear what?" asked Jane, who, by the way had not lost a word which had been said.

"Why, this man says he's waited until Leap Year's nigh gone in the hope some one would ask him to marry. *You* ask him and see what he will say to it."

Jane simpered, the younger specimen of femininity giggled outright, and Swipes blushed to behind the ears. This put a damper on the conversation, for Mr. Swipes' thoughts being turned matrimonially again, he felt disposed to brood over his sorrows, while the women folk, having taken the matter in hand, were getting up such a dinner as

the little cabin on Gouge-Eye Point had never seen before.

The grateful scent of the viands reached the olfactory nerves of Swipes, and he took a mental inventory of the charms of Aunt Jane, who was warming up the remnants of the beef and beans in a most appetizing manner. Swipes was entirely satisfied; what if she *did* smoke, it was only an additional reason why she should be his own. "Here we could sit," said that worthy to himself, "she there and me here and I'd never be out of tobacker, for I could borry from her when mine was gone. Wish she would ask me; doggoned if I don't." And Mr. Swipes at once erected an air castle to take the place of his two-roomed cabin, installed Jane as the mistress of it, and was only called from the contemplation of his vision of bliss by the matter-of-fact announcement that dinner was ready.

As we have before stated that the Swipes dresser contained but two plates, the question of precedence became quite a serious one. It was finally settled that Swipes and Aunt Jane should wait, that amiable lady having imparted the information to them that "the smell of the wittles when cooking allus took away her appetite," and Swipes having, of course, too much of the gentleman about him to sit at the first table and let ladies wait. This

question being settled to the great satisfaction of all concerned, dinner was eaten in the order we have intimated, and Swipes and Aunt Jane had nearly finished theirs, when the door opened without the formality of a knock and old Bender walked in.

To explain the sudden appearance of this estimable gentleman, we will state that he had been having excellent luck at the game and had gathered in nearly all the ready cash of the other fellows. Then, finding there was a disposition on their part to continue the game and "owe" him the amount of their losses, he suddenly remembered that his wife had gone away in the morning and had not returned. This thought produced such an effect upon his sensitive mind that he immediately pocketed his winnings and "jumped" the game, much to the disgust of the "busted" ones, who thus saw their chances to "get even" vanish with his departing form. But old Bender was right. If I had the little dabs which fellows owe me in that way, I'd go to Washington and start a "Freedman's Bank."

"Now, yer a nice couple," said Bender, surveying the pair. "What a pity it is that yer couldn't allus be that way."

"So I say," responded Swipes. "You can't bluff me out in that way. This jest suits."

Aunt Jane said nothing. She looked once as though about to speak, but changed her mind and stopped a sigh with a big spoonful of beans.

Mr. Bender indulged in other remarks of an equally facetious nature, during which the couple made a pretty clean sweep of what was left. And, as if to add to the jollity of the party, when they had finished dinner the storm ceased, the sun shone out brightly and all hands (including Mr. Swipes) sallied out to take advantage of the clearing off, in such haste that they nearly forgot the umbrellas the prudent Mr. Bender had brought with him.

Let me record it here, as an instance of the sinfulness of woman's nature, that Mrs. Bender so arranged it that Swipes and Aunt Jane walked together, behind. I don't say, mind you, that this was disagreeable to either of them—I merely mention it by way of illustration. Women like to fix up these little matters between their friends, and I, for one, don't feel disposed to quarrel with them about doing it.

But to continue the thread of this eventful history. Swipes and Aunt Jane walked sturdily along and our hero essayed to call up the fund of "small talk" which he had been wont to use in days of yore and which is supposed to be so agreeable to the ears of the fair sex. The conversation never flagged until the journey was nearly ended and the

Bender mansion appeared in view when Swipes became silent and lost in thought. Aunt Jane felt, intuitively, that the unexpected might happen at any moment.

"I was thinking," said Swipes, rousing himself with an effort, "about it being Leap Year. Do you suppose the ladies ever do?"

"Ever do what?"

"Why, you know. Pop the question. Propose."

"I don't know, I am sure," said Aunt Jane, bridling. "I know this, though: If there's any proposing that I am concerned in, it won't be me that'll do it."

"Oh, certainly; of course not, though I wouldn't mind it if you did. But I was thinking, as we came along, how tough it is on a feller when he puts on a pot of beans to cook and maybe has to set up and watch 'em, when he's awful tired, cos, you know, if they burnt it would all be for nothing."

"I don't know nothing about your nasty beans," said Jane.

"No, dear, you don't; but I wish you would. When I say beans, it means everything; salt to season 'em, bacon to give 'em a right flavor; butter to make 'em rich, with bread and sich things as a relish.—I've got the best claim on Greaser Flat, but I ain't happy a bit; I want it to benefit some one

besides me, who will cook the beans I eat. Jane, will you do it?"

"No, I won't; at least I won't do it now, Mr. Swipes. If you are in earnest, I may consider what you have said, but I tell you flat I wouldn't agree to cook beans all my life for the best man that ever lived, the first day I saw him. There, now."

Mr. Swipes hung his diminished head and they walked on in gloomy silence. But soon after, from the frequency of his visits to the Bender's domicile, it was whispered among the boys that Swipes was "dead stuck" on Mrs. Bender's aunt, who, albeit, a "maiden lady of uncertain age," was really not much older than her buxom niece. And when, one Sunday afternoon, Swipes came into Jake Ferry's "Resort," and with a grin on his face a yard long, asked all hands to "take su'thin," we knew that he had reached the pinnacle of human bliss.

As everybody knows, or ought to know, how a wedding is conducted, it will hardly be necessary for me to give an elaborate description of the ceremony, and as to describing the trousseau of the bride or the toilettes of the ladies, I simply cannot do it. Slim Jim acted as the groom's best man and to this day goes down to Gouge-Eye Point, as in the bachelor days of his friend Swipes, when he gets hungry for a "square meal," or feels inclined to be sociable, for Aunt Jane proved to be a good

soul and took to Swipes' old cronies kindly. But, as in my last chronicle, there was no mention of children and some growling about it, I shall briefly mention that Swipes points proudly to no less than five, including, of course, the twins. If that doesn't satisfy the most punctilious stickler for details, I don't know what will.

MRS. CRUMPEY'S BOARDERS

CHAPTER I.

"Mr. Crumpey, I want a cook."

Mr. Crumpey removed the pipe from his lips and stared at his wife in open-mouthed astonishment. And no wonder. It was the first time since the Crumpeys had joined hearts and hands that his amiable lady had made her wishes known in a manner so emphatic. "I mean what I say, Mr. Crumpey," continued the lady, when she saw her spouse opposed only the *vis inertiae* to the onslaught of words she was prepared to throw at him. "I mean what I say, I want a cook."

Mr. Crumpey restored the pipe and took two or three whiffs before he became composed enough to speak. Then he removed it again, and helplessly asked, "Where in the world, Ann, can we get a cook?"

"That's for you to find out, and find out soon, too, I can tell you. It's nothing but cook and wash dishes, *cook and wash dishes*, COOK AND WASH DISHES from morning till night, with you lazing

around smoking that stinking old pipe among the men. And I won't stand it any longer."

It was quite evident to me, who was an unseen listener to this matrimonial jar, that our usually meek landlady was terribly in earnest. And evidently Mr. Crumpey thought so, too.

"Well, Ann, never mind, that's a dear. I'll write down to the city and see if we can get a girl to come here, an' while we're waiting I'll help you the best I can."

I venture to say that if Mr. Crumpey could have foreseen what a scornful upturn of the nose his better half in the future would be able to make, she would never have been Mrs. Crumpey.

"Yes. You'll help. You helped last night when I asked you to peel the potatoes for breakfast. And you helped yesterday when I wanted you to pick some beans. Ho, ho!"

"But, Ann, I had business——"

"Business. Yes, playing cards with Robinson and them other fellows."

"That was business," retorted Mr. Crumpey. "When a feller keeps bar and fellers come in an' want to play for the nips, he's got to make up the game."

"How much profit did you make out of that business?" asked Mrs. Crumpey.

"Well, Ann," said Mr. Crumpey, sheepishly, "the boys did beat me."

"I know they did," said Mrs. Crumpey, triumphantly. "I heard them talking how cheap drinks had got to be, since they had got you to play eucher. And all this time I'm slaving in the kitchen for them and you. You won't send anywhere, Mr. Crumpey. You'll go yourself and get somebody to cook—or this hash house closes." And Mrs. Crumpey, feeling that no more need be said bounced out of the room.

The boarding house on Hungry Gulch, the management of the culinary department of which had been Mrs. Crumpey's special care from its start, and which had thus been made a subject of conversation between its owners, was one of those primitive affairs which, starting from a log cabin of a couple of rooms, had been added to from time to time until it was now a pile of buildings. When the Crumpeys first came to the Gulch the head of the family was an honest miner, and his better half enjoyed the distinction of being the only woman in the camp. I have to record the fact that the claim of Mr. Crumpey did not pay, and his prudent wife being the better manager of the two, had Crumpey put up a canvas addition to the house, and took in a few boarders to help swell the family earnings. The goodness of the viands set upon

the Crumpey's hospitable board was such that the majority of the denizens of the once famed locality sought quarters there, and Mr. Crumpey, nothing loath to exchange a heavy pick for the role of mine host, added that most necessary adjunct of a mining place of business, a bar, to the other attractions of the place. Thus far Mrs. Crumpey had done all the kitchen work herself, but it was quite evident from the manner of that excellent woman, that she had come to the conclusion that the work was more than she cared to tackle. Mr. Crumpey followed his good wife's example and disappeared, but he took his way toward the bar instead of the kitchen. It may be remarked *en passant* that I had only recently become a boarder at the Hungry Gulch hostelry, and that my presence there was due to a big rock which caved from the bank, and as it had to alight somewhere, fell, and not too gently, on one of my feet.

Considering myself an invalid in a small way, I had taken quarters with the Crumpeys, and at the time I became an unseen confidant of the Crumpey's family confab, was lying in my bunk, absorbed in one of the latest emanations from the pen of that then favorite, Mr. J. F. Smith.

Well, would you believe it, but who should come to Crumpey's that night for supper but Long Jake and Missouri Bill. Mrs. Crumpey opined that

there were a couple more mouths for her to cook for, for the first named gentleman signified to her liege lord between mouthfuls, "that he had got plumb tired of boardin' himself." Mrs. Crumpey looked darkly at Mr. Crumpey and with a stern nod told him to "remember what she had told him."

"When are you going, Crumpey?" I asked, an hour or so afterwards.

"Going where?" asked Crumpey.

"To the city. Ain't you going to get some one to help Mrs. Crumpey? I heard you were."

"Who the d—— told you anything about it?" demanded Crumpey, fiercely.

I blushed. Perhaps those who know me will be inclined to dispute that fact, but it had only then occurred to me that I had laid myself liable to imputation of being an eavesdropper. I confessed the truth, however, and told him I had heard him and his wife speaking about it.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Crumpey, who, when he found that his wife had been airing her grievance only to him, became mollified at once. "Well, yes, Ann thinks the work is getting too hard for her alone, and did speak to me about getting some one to help her. I suppose I have to go to the city, for I scarce know where to look for a girl without."

"What's that Crumpey? Want a gal? Why don't you ride over to the flat and get one of Colonel Stebbins' gals?"

"Didn't know there was a Colonel Stebbins at the flat, or that he had any daughters," responded Crumpey.

"But there is. The Colonel got in over the plains last week, and is just restin' his oxen a bit while he looks aroun'. He's got three gals, an' I 'spect one or two on 'em would like a job fust rate."

"Are they good cooks?" queried Crumpey.

"Cooks? Oh, no, they can't cook. P'raps Jemima don't know how to make dodgers that'll jist melt in yer mouth. Cook, well, I sh'd say they did."

And Missouri Bill stroked his whiskers fiercely at the idea of a doubt being entertained of the culinary abilities of the Colonel's daughters.

"I'll ride over to the flat tomorrow, then," said Crumpey. "Perhaps one of them will come and help Ann while we're having this rush. Or maybe, as you're acquainted with the family, you will go for me."

It did not strike me at the time (although it did afterwards), how readily Bill assented to this proposition. But he did assent and next morning was off on his mission, and before nightfall came

back and imparted the intelligence to the waiting Crumpeys that the Colonel's second girl, Jemima, would come over next day, or as soon after, anyway, as her pap could get a mule for her to ride. And, sure enough, the next day they came. Need it be said that the patronage of the Hungry Gulch Hotel increased at once immeasurably. Mrs. Crumpey had her burdens lightened but she was now only a star of the second magnitude. The young and buxom Jemima became the goddess at whose shrine the single gentry of the Gulch came to worship. Mrs. Crumpey was a woman, that was all right, but Jemima was a "gal"; and the consumption of the Sunday dinners at the Crumpey house increased out of all proportion to what it had been prior to the day of Jemima's advent upon us. But this state of affairs was too good to last, and when, one morning, Missouri Bill appeared in his best suit of butternut jeans, all hands felt instinctively that something more than ordinary was about to happen. And it did happen. The fellow had bought Long Jake out in the cabin they owned and before the swains of the Gulch realized their danger, old Squire Besom came, and with a few magic words robbed the Crumpeys of the attraction of their household, and transferred it up the Gulch to Bill's cabin.

"It's no use cutting up about it, Mrs. Crumpey," said Bill, when the lady reproached him for having used their place as a sort of stepping stone. "It's a fac' that Jemima and I had a sort of sneak-in' notion for each other before I left the States. I was powerful glad to get a place for her while I was getting things fixed up, an' you've no call to git roiled cos we didn't tell you all about it. Hope you two will be sociable like, kase wimmen are orful skase hyar. So long."

CHAPTER II.

For a few days the boarders of Hungry Gulch Hotel fared rather badly. Our worthy hostess, having had a spell of comparative leisure for a month of Jemima's stay, did not take at all kindly to the kitchen work again. Her first proceeding was to start Crumpey out for another assistant, and that gentleman having enjoyed greater peace of mind for the past month than ordinary, while the profits greatly increased, was not averse to being started out. But Mr. Crumpey, like others of whom I wot, had a decided objection to any more physical exertion than could be avoided, and again fell into error of having others do for him what he could have done himself. Instead of going to

the city, he wrote to his brother living there, explaining what he wanted, and the answer came in the shape of the person of Miss Sophronia Goggins, a lady of about thirty summers, who had thus far steered clear of the shoals and quicksands of matrimony.

Miss Goggins was not what one would call a beauty, except, perhaps, by some far-fetched comparison. Of her antecedents little was known, but that little was quite favorable, so far as was requisite to the purposes of the house of Hungry Gulch. But it was quite fortunate, perhaps, that we do not all see an object from the same point of vision, that what is beauty in the eyes of one, is not to the eyes of his fellows, and vice versa. Now, for instance, the Arab worships as a paragon of loveliness, a woman whose face is "like a full moon," and as a further illustration of the truth of our position, travelers have written of tribes of savages where female beauty depends upon *avoir-dupois*. With either of the peoples I have named, Miss Sophronia would have been at once set aside and put out of the show of competition, for to look at her, a man would think at first sight that he could hang his hat on a projecting angle on almost any side. But whatever may have been Miss Sophronia's imperfections of form and feature in the opinion of your humble servant and those who

thought with him, it soon became evident that we all did not think alike. And here, also, let me add, that while said form and features might not have been such as to excite the admiration of all the lords of creation, she possessed one feminine attribute which endeared her to our stomachs, if not our hearts—she could cook.

The first rain of the season had been one occasion of the first accession of boarders at the hospitable Crumpey home. It had come rather early, but the Forty-niners had looked wise, told of the downpour of the year previous, prophesied an unlimited depth of snow in the mountains with flood after flood along the river banks and the fresh-'uns from the States could not for a moment offer to dispute such high authority. So, when the first storm came there was an exodus from the summer claims to "dry diggins" and the claim owners of Hungry Gulch were elated to find a house built to their hands, where, instead of having to roll out and kindle fires on a frosty morning, they could stretch in their blankets in luxuriant ease, while the matutinal meal was being prepared. And, once having tasted these comforts it was hard to give them up again as Crumpey kept his boarders, notwithstanding the changes of administration, and interregnums which came into the Crumpey kitchen. Notable among the crowd which gath-

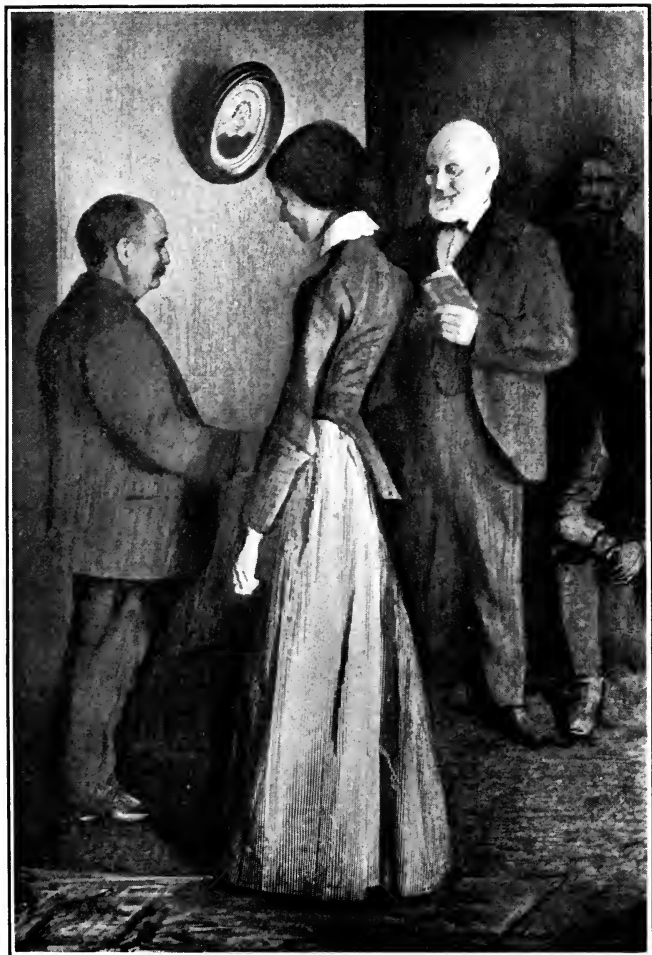
ered diurnally around the Crumpey board, was Fat Jack, who, while I will not assert he was the laziest fellow that ever lived, was certainly the laziest I ever saw. Jack's partners had built a cabin near the forks of the Gulch, but Jack showed no disposition to occupy it, even after his partners had left for Digger Flat, where they had found claims in locating which, the name of Jack was *ex industria* omitted. But, though the lymphatic temperament of Jack kept him to the hotel rather than do his own cooking, the blind god found his way into Jack's heart, and it was not many days before he showed such unmistakable symptoms of being smitten with the charms of the angular Sophronia, that the whole crowd of bummers were on the *cuidad* to see what the next move would be. We were not long left in doubt. Philosophers who have made the amatory feelings of mankind a study, assert that men (and perforce women), seek their opposites in love. Jack was fat and Sophronia was lean; he was short and dumpy—she tall, and thin enough almost to hide behind a broom handle. He was disposed to take the world as easy as he could, while she had enough "get up and get" to supply a dozen such families. Is it any wonder, then, if the theory of the aforesaid philosophers be a true one, that the flourishing camp of Hungry Gulch should have its romance, and that

from carrying an occasional bucket of water from the Gulch to relieve the fair Sophronia from that task when the meal hours close at hand demanded her whole attention, Jack fell to thinking it would be a good thing to pack water for Sophronia for the whole of their natural lives.

Whether that was the identical process of reasoning in which Jack indulged we cannot say, but certain it was, that before Christmas came we were again favored with the presence of Squire Besom, and in the presence of a few of the select (for Jack knew that his course would not be approved by the majority of his cronies), the words which bound them together until death or the district court should put them asunder were spoken.

CHAPTER III.

It was again my bad fortune to be a listener to a dialogue between the Crumpeys about the new situation in which the unlooked-for conduct of Fat Jack and Miss Sophronia had placed the Hungry Gulch establishment. But, having now been a paying boarder from the time the laws of gravitation had caused the rock to injure my left pedal extremity, Mrs. Crumpey had come to regard me as one of the family, and either for that reason, or



The words which bound them together until death or the district court should put them asunder, were spoken. (See page 246.)

because she wanted the presence of one who would probably side with her in what she had to say, Mrs. Crumpey did not wait to get her liege lord by himself to become the recipient of a curtain lecture, but boldly tackled him before me. And she commenced by hitting him in the tenderest spot your average benedict can be hit.

"Mr. Crumpey, I want some money."

"How much, Ann?" asked that gentleman, pulling a handful of silver from his pocket.

"More than you've clawed up there," replied Mrs. Crumpey, with a scornful look at his offerings. "I want two hundred dollars."

"Mercy on me, Ann," said Crumpey, soon as he could get his breath. "Why, there ain't that much money in the house."

"Then go dig it up where you've got it sunk," retorted Mrs. Crumpey. "I was a fool to trust anything to you in the first place. I shall go to the city tomorrow, myself; and see if I can't get a cook that will not pack off with the first man that asks her to. Two hundred dollars, I say."

"Bless us, Ann; but what will the boarders do, if you go away?"

"I expect they'll fare pretty poorly, if they depend upon you. You couldn't leave your old eucher game long enough to cook them a breakfast if they were starving. But I've looked out for

them. I had sense enough to see that that Goggins thing was going to make a fool of herself, and that's why I wouldn't let you send the old 'Communicator' away. He can cook for you till I come back. Two hundred dollars."

It was very plain to me that if Mr. Crumpey had the sum she mentioned, which I did not doubt, that she would get it, and sure enough the next day saw her perched on Bill Somer's mule, ready to start for the goodly city of Sacramento, the point from whence our portion of the mines was supplied with everything it purchased, from a paper of tacks up. And as I shook hands with her and wished her a successful journey, she said:

"Keep the boys in good humor, won't you, Mr. Squills? I'll hurry back. I'll bring some one back with me that'll have some sense about you men."

It affords me great pleasure to chronicle the fact, that Hungry Gulch got along famously for a while after our hostess' departure. The "Communicator" was an old Oregonian, who had somehow strayed up to his present quarters, and among other frontier accomplishments, had acquired the one to get up a good, plain meal for almost any number of men. Unfortunately, he had a little weakness (as all great men have), and this weakness of the "Communicator" was gin and bitters. He did not imbibe this mixture as a regular bever-

age by any means, nay, he knew his weakness and fought manfully against it, but the fact was nevertheless, that in a most unexpected moment he would seize with a desire for a potation, and if he got it, would be howling drunk in no time afterwards. As may be presumed the knowledge of this failure of the webfoot gentleman was a bar to his advancement, notably so in the previous case, for Mrs. Crumpey had strong intentions of putting him permanently in the place made vacant by the perfidious Sophronia, and was only deterred from doing so by the fear that some fine afternoon gin and bitters would get the better of him and leave her worse off than before.

But the "Communicator" had given her his faithful promise to not look upon the tempter for one week at least, and strong in her faith in his promise, she set out on her mission.

Before the stipulated week expired the expressman, making the regular trips brought copies of the *Times* and *Transcript* for us, and a letter to Crumpey. In the paper we saw her name in the list of wants and Crumpey informed us, in high glee, that his wife was going to bring a "widder" up with her.

"She'll find she's raised thunder this time," added Crumpey, with a huge grin.

"Thunder, why?"

"Bringin' a widder up here among you chaps. Why, one widder'l do more towards getting you fellers stuck after her in forty minutes than a gal would in forty weeks." And Mr. Crumpey looked as if he only hoped his auguries would prove true.

"Widders have a knack of getting fellers on a string afore they really know it," continued Mr. Crumpey, musingly. "I was pretty near being corralled by one back in Injianny—I do believe, if I hadn't hurried up matters with Ann that widder would have married me agin my will." Mr. Crumpey did not appear to derive the consolation he should from this reflection, for he sighed gloomily.

I did not press Mr. Crumpey for the confidences he seemed so willing to unbosom himself of, but went in to the kitchen to inform the "Communicator" of the intelligence received. That gentleman, however, was so unsteady in his movements, as he swayed over a big pan of dough for biscuits, dropping ashes from his pipe into the mixture every little while, that I saw he had yielded again to his gin and bitters which would soon have the mastery over him.

In due time, however, the expected ones arrived and it did not take our worthy hostess long to discover that the "Communicator" had broken faith with her and he was ignominiously hustled from

the premises. Our supper that night was made up of odds and ends for I had imparted to the boarders the incident of the ashes in the dough, as a reason why the nice looking biscuits should be ignored, but we had a rousing breakfast, prepared by the landlady and her new assistant, who was introduced to us by the plebeian name of Mrs. Brown. All the faith I had heretofore possessed in the good sense and judgment of Mrs. Crumpey vanished as soon as I saw what she had brought among us. When Crumpey told me about the expected "widder" I had immediately formed a picture of her in my mind's eye wherein she was represented as fat and dumpy, about forty years old, or on the shady side of forty, skimp haired and toothless, with a touch of rheumatics in her gait. But, how different from my preconceived opinions were the facts. Imagine, if you can, a plump little woman on the sunny side of thirty, with brown eyes and golden hair, and a voice soft and musical as the tones of a flute. I felt in danger of making a fool of myself the first week she was there, and Bill Sykes did. I learned this fact from Mrs. Crumpey, who I believe I have already observed, made quite a confidant of me. "It's what you might expect, though," said I. "Such a nice looking piece as Mrs. Brown must expect admirers."

"They can admire, if they want to, Squills, but that's all the good it'll do 'em. She's had enough of matrimony I can tell you. There ain't the man living who can persuade her to put her neck in the noose again."

The patronage of the house, which had fallen off some under the regime of the "Communicator," soon was back to and even beyond the former standard. A live woman in the mines was in itself something out of the usual course, and when to this was added the fact that the woman was young, single and handsome, it is not to be wondered at, if the whole masculine population was aroused. It was not long, either, that the hopeful swains (most of them who had left an Eliza, Jerusha, Malvina, or some other female at home to await their return with the much hoped for "pile"), thinking probably the old saying of the "early bird" would apply in this case as well as others, began to show outward symptoms of the hidden impulses of their hearts, which told us who were unscathed, the truth, plainer than words could have done. Let me say this, in praise of myself, however, that after the first paroxysm of admiration on my part, I had returned to my allegiance to my Betsy Ann, and could contemplate the maneuvers of my less trustworthy companions with the utmost equanimity—hence, probably, I was made

the repository of the hopes and fears of more than one who dared look forward in the hopes of possessing the fair widow at no very distant day. After Bill Sykes got his quietus he abandoned the Crumpey board and fixed up a cabin just below the forks of the Gulch, for which action on his part he got no credit. I think both Mrs. Crumpey and the fair widow would have kept secret the tale of his rejection, but he sulked so badly and avoided his old resorts so entirely, that the crowd soon dropped on to the state of affairs. "Shanky" Myres gave his view of Bill's conduct when he said: "Well, if I ax a woman to marry me an' she don't want me, she can just go to thunder—I shan't let her spoil my appetite for good grub," which sentiment met with high favor. Alas, poor Shanky. What a difference there is between profession and practice with us all. Shanky first gave indubitable signs of having fallen a victim to the charms of the widow by appearing at the dinner table one Sunday in the closing months of winter, rigged out in a boiled shirt and a pair of thin boots. Arkansas Joe went Shanky one better, having given a dollar to Squire Besom's darkey to cut his hair. Not to be outdone in the endeavors to make themselves presentable in the eyes of the object of their soul's affection, the rest of the widow's admirers were not behind in the matter of personal adornment.

Dutch Bob even went so far as to buy a razor, and shave clean.

Life was fast becoming a burden to Mrs. Brown. Did she look into the sitting room (barroom I mean), of an evening half a dozen were on their feet in a minute in the hopes of something being wanted. Did the water bucket get low—some one was there to fill it. If she escaped, after the day's labor was over to read, one or the other would be around, and even if he didn't talk to her, he looked so wishful, that in the goodness of her heart she would lay the book aside. But it was when Mrs. Crumpey would leave the family apartment for the night's rest, that the agony became unbearable. There were always two or three watching for an opportunity to have a word with her, for her ears alone, and each would try to outsit the other; so in self-defense she had put off to bed an hour or two before she wanted to. But as I still remained true to my allegiance to Betsy Ann, she instinctively felt that she could confide in me. "Oh, Mr. Squills," said she to me, one day as I passed by the kitchen door, on my way to the claim. "I'm in a peck of trouble and want your advice."

"Tell me your troubles and you shall have it. It may not be worth much, though."

"Oh, I'm pestered to death by these men."

"You ought to feel flattered, Mrs. Brown."

"But I don't. Here's Lord knows how many of them want to marry me. And I can't marry all, or any of them."

"Then tell them so and send them about their business."

"That's what I've tried to do, and they won't be sent. There's Arkansas Joe is a sample for you. He says to me, 'You'll feel different some day, and won't hate our sex so much an' I'll wait.' What am I to do when men talk that way?"

"Well, the fellow is pretty well gone on you, I must say. Is he the only one that has proposed?"

"No, Shanky has, and so has Mr. Hume. But there's several more that want a word in private with me, so they say."

"Well, Mrs. Brown, it is a hard case to advise. Why don't you set a time for each one when you'll give him his answer. Have the same time for all and mitten the whole caboodle at once?"

"What an idea. But I needn't have expected any sympathy from you, or any other man. I declare it's too mean. I wish they would do like Mr. Sykes did. No, I don't, either. It would break up Mrs. Crumpey's business. I've a great mind to go away tomorrow."

"For Heaven's sake don't do that, Mrs. Brown; if you do we'll have to fall back on the old 'Communicator,' or else go to boarding ourselves."

"Well, I won't then," said she, relenting. "That is, I won't if I can help myself. I want to stay here until spring, but I can't be pestered the way I am."

"Well, Mrs. Brown, I can't advise you any better than I have." Just then Mrs. Crumpey came in and I went out.

I believe I have already mentioned the fact that I was in confidence of some of the would-be lovers as well. Consequently I was not surprised when Shanky took me one side the next Monday for a confidential communication.

"I'm gettin' on bully with the widow, Squills. I talked to her again last night, and she asked a month to consider, perviding I didn't say anything more. I'll be all right."

I could do no less than congratulate him. But I wondered all the same, if Mrs. Brown had taken my advice, after all.

A month is not a very long time. If I owe a man a hundred dollars to be paid in a month, pay-day comes around with frightful rapidity. But in the present instance a month was only an ordinary one to me, whatever it had been to Shanky. I had entirely forgotten the conversation, when one afternoon Shanky sought me once more.

"Tomorrow I'll know my fate, Squills."

"How is that, Shanky?"

"Month is up. She told me to come into the sitting room at nine in the evening."

"And do you still feel confident as you did?"

"I don't know how I feel. Guess it will be all right. I see she's thrown off on those other fellows entirely."

The next day, however, the Hungry Gulch was favored with a visit from a gentleman, whom we couldn't put up. Shanky thought he was the fresh one that was expected to buy the Hogem Claim, while Joe was equally sure that if he stayed at the Gulch he'd blossom out into a faro dealer. He was not a miner, that was certain, for one look at his hands was enough to show that he didn't handle the pick and shovel. No one seemed to know him, nor did he seem to know any one there, though he sent his mule back and evidently intended to stay a while.

"Busy this evening, Mr. Squills?" asked the widow of me at supper time, in a low voice.

"Not that I know of. Why do you ask?"

"I'd like to have you come into the sitting room after a while. Say about nine o'clock, if you can."

I promised I would and went on with supper. As I had been in the habit of dropping into the sitting room whenever I felt like it, I had no preparations to make for the occasion, and would just as like as not got into a game of seven-up with

Crumpey, if Shanky had not come in with his boiled shirt on. That reminded me that nine o'clock was the time when he was to learn his fate, and I wouldn't then have missed the appointment on any terms. Pretty soon in came Arkansas Joe, and he was dressed up, and looking around the room it seemed as though the majority was going to a ball or somewhere else, of feminine resort.

As it came near the appointed time I stepped into the ladies' apartment, which I found empty except for the stranger who came that day. Men didn't need introductions in those days and it wasn't long before we struck up an acquaintance. Then the door opened and in came Shanky, who looked at us as though he wished us—well, anywhere except where we were. He was soon followed by Arkansas Joe, and he by Hume, and so they kept coming until there were about a dozen of us and still no signs of the widow. But presently she came in with Mrs. Crumpey. She was dressed in her best and looked prettier than ever.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said she, in that musical voice, "I am pleased to see you all here. Let me introduce you to my husband, Mr. Brown, who came today."

Talk of the silence of the tombs! It would have been revelry compared with that room.

"My husband and I have been estranged, but all is explained now. And as friends of mine I know that you will all be pleased at our reconciliation."

Still silence. It was broken at last—Shanky Myres was first to break it. "Well, I'll be——," said he, as he went through the door. Whether human nature is deceitful or not, I do not feel called upon to say. There were some who slipped out after Shanky, but Arkansas Joe came up and shook hands with Mr. and Mrs. Brown.

"You told the truth, Mrs. Brown, when you told me you couldn't marry. I give up, and only hope Brown ain't come to take our cook away. This is the first of April, an' I must say you've played it bully on the hull bilin' of us."

MR. SNIVELY'S VACATION

Mr. Snively had swept off his doorstep, tidied up his domicile generally, carried all the old boots, breeches, gum clothes and other essentials of a laborer in hydraulic diggings into his woodshed, and thus having righted everything in and about the house to his supreme satisfaction had lighted that constant companion of his lonely hours and lain down on the improvised lounge on the porch to enjoy life.

It will be needless, after the above résumé of Mr. Snively's operations, for us to add that he was a bachelor. But he was, and apparently a confirmed one. Tradition pointed to the fact that some twelve, fifteen years or more before, Mr. Snively had been most assiduous in his attention to one Lucy Jane Jones, eldest daughter of the local physician of that name, who at that time had reached the mature age of fourteen years. Also that Mr. Snively's then partner (Long Jake) had made some remarks to him about the matter, in which the words "trundle-bed trash" were more than once repeated, and that as a consequence of this unwarranted mixing in of Long Jake into mat-

ters which were of no consequence to him, the firm of Snively & Company was hastily dissolved, and Long Jake hied to other quarters. But Lucy Jane, finding that female charms were at a premium in the matrimonial market of the times, while her own budding beauties were rated far above those of her sex who had advanced a few years farther along the path of life, incontinently snubbed Mr. Snively soon afterward, by going to an evening party with Arkansas Bill, leaving Mr. Snively, who had called at the doctor's residence with the implied understanding that he should be her escort, in a state of great wrath and mortification. As Lucy Jane never showed any signs of repenting the Arkansas Bill episode, but persisted in encouraging the attentions of that estimable gentleman until he, in turn, was "left" for a Dutch butcher, with plenty of fat cattle (who finally bore away the prize), Mr. Snively felt that he must uphold the dignity of manhood by letting Lucy Jane severely alone, which he did. Hence what bade fair to be two loving hearts, drifted further and further apart, and the only consolation Mr. Snively felt was first, when Arkansas Bill was dropped, and second, the shrivelled, baggy, dragged out appearance made by Lucy Jane, after she had been the butcher's wife for ten or a dozen years.

Being a gentleman of very orderly tastes, Mr. Snively had fitted up his domicile with such an eye to comfort and beauty, that it gave rise more than once to the impression that the gentleman had, in the many of the gentler sex who, from time to time grew to womanhood, in, or essayed a brief residence at, Blue Canyon, one who he felt was the one above all others, fitted to take the place in his heart once held by the perfidious Lucy Jane. But the march of time served only to show the falsity of these rumors, the wound had been too deep to be so easily healed. Mr. Snively adorned his porch with climbing, and the walk to his house with monthly, roses, for his own gratification. He papered the walls of his cabin with select cuts from *Harper's Weekly* or *Frank Leslie's Illustrated* that his own eye could have the pleasure of resting thereon. He kept a cow because he liked plenty of milk, raised cabbages, turnips and squash because he had a nice piece of ground for that purpose, and finally got himself a big double bed with two mattresses, because he liked his comfort when the toils of the day were over. No more thoughts of matrimony found place in his mind, the society of his tabby cat was all that he desired. Perhaps the fact that many times since Lucy Jane's reprehensible conduct had doomed him to single blessedness, that the bedrock had come close to the surface, with no

blue gravel on it, may have had something to do with his fixed resolution. For it cannot be denied, that under such circumstances, the expense of a family, with grub and gum boots for himself, is enough to make an expectant benedict shudder, and one who is only contemplating matrimony from a safe distance, rejoice, that a way of escape is yet open.

We left Mr. Snively comfortably smoking. Lying upon the lounge we have described with his feet at an angle of about thirty degrees above the rest of his person, he watched the fragrant wreaths as they curled in fantastic spirals and floated away, and was supremely happy. Such is the soothing, mollifying effects of a good conscience and good tobacco. Suddenly he heard the gate of his yard close with a bang, and looking lazily down the walk, saw some of his neighbor's children approaching. Mr. Snively did not think it worth his while to change from the comfortable recumbent position he had taken, so he remained quiet.

"Mr. Snively," piped a little girl, "we have come to ask you for a melon."

"A millyon; yes, of course, glad to have you come and ask for one, instead of spoiling half a dozen for the sake of stealing one," and Mr. Snively good-naturedly rose and headed the procession to the melon patch.

We have said nothing of melons heretofore, but the fact was, that the Snively garden was famous in the season for the luscious, juicy specimens of that fruit which the scientific husbandry of our friend caused it to produce. It was near the end of the melon time now, and many a feast had the little ones of Blue Canyon indulged in by the favor of our bachelor friend, for he doted on children—thought almost as much of one as of a cat. We regret much to say, that certain boys had taken advantage of Mr. Snively's absence to "plug" numerous melons before they found some of sufficient ripeness to tempt their boyish palates, at which procedure Mr. Snively waxed wroth and his usually placid nature was so stirred up that he for a time swore vengeance against the whole tribe of kids at Blue Canyon. But in a few days the natural goodness of the Snively disposition, combined with a large accession to the number of melons, led Mr. Snively to reconsider his first determination and the youthful privileges were restored.

Mr. Snively led the march to the melon patch, and made the hearts of the youngsters happy at the expense of the last ripe one he had. When it was thus disposed of the time for conversation had come.

"Why ain't you chaps at school, now?"

"'Cos, we've got a vacation, sir."

"A vacation! That means that you are to run wild till school takes up again. I don't see the use of vacations, no how. You forget what you've learned before you git a chance to keep on. It's just like miners what spend in the summer what they've made in the winter time. How long will this vacation last?"

"Only till school ma'am comes back, sir."

"Is the school ma'am taking a vacation, too?"

"Yes, sir; and mamma's gone with her."

"And who gets up the feed for your pap while your mamma's gone? Not you, little coves?"

"Oh no, sir, papa's sister has come to see us. She is having a vacation, too."

Mr. Snively opened his eyes widely at this information. But he gave no further sign as they kept on down the walk until the gate was reached.

"Tell you what, young 'uns. I want to see your pap. Is he at home?"

"No, sir, he went up to Grub Creek this morning."

"Well, tell him to come over when he can. I'm going to take a vacation myself, and I'd kind of like the old man to look out a little for things here, while I was gone."

As the implied engagement of their worthy progenitor seemed to promise them the freedom of the melon patch when more ripe ones came on in the

due course of nature, the observations of Mr. Snively fell upon attentive ears. With a promise that his message should be given forthwith the troop departed and Mr. Snively resumed his position in the grateful shade of the porch.

It was so fated, however, that the repose in which Mr. Snively hoped to indulge, was again to be rudely interrupted. For the genial Mr. Wells, the fond parent of the brood which had made the descent upon Snively, had suddenly changed his mind about prospecting up Grub Canyon, and putting off that venture until a cooler season, was at home upon their return, and each rushed forward to be the first in delivering the message.

"So," said Mr. Wells, "Old Bill is going to take a vacation? I wonder what fool notion has come into his head now? But he's a good feller, an' I guess me and the young 'uns can take care of his traps for him. Oh, Lizy!"

Eliza, who had just completed that everlasting task of womankind, and got the dinner dishes washed and put away, was in her room, fixing herself up (for she was a neat body), for the enjoyment of the afternoon, so it took two or three calls from Mr. Wells to bring her in sight. But she came at last.

"Lizy, don't you want to take a walk?"

"What, in this hot sun? Why, you must think I'm stuck after walkin'. Where d'ye want me to go?"

"Well, Bill Snively has sent word that he wants to see me, an' I just thought I'd run over at once."

"It's not my place to go round callin' on your people here, an' I ain't goin' to do it. When Mrs. Snively has called on me it will be time enough for me to go trapesing there."

"Mrs. Snively, haw, haw, haw. There ain't no Mrs. Snively. Bill's a bach."

"An' you want *me* to be runnin' around to see old baches! Jehiel, what can you be thinking on? I saw one bach's house yesterday, an' a woman couldn't get near the door 'thout spoiling her dress on tobacco quids. No, indeed."

Mr. Wells didn't seem discouraged at this flat refusal. He chewed his tobacco reflectively, taking no apparent offense at the remarks of his maiden sister about the "tobacco quids" which had excited her indignation and distrust when she spoke of the approaches to the miner's domicile which had obtruded itself upon her vision during the journey she had made. Mr. Wells had an object, and felt that he must dissemble. What deceivers men are!

"I think you'd better go, Lizy. 'Taint like what you may think. Bill's an old pard—we mined to-

gether on Squaw Flat twenty years ago. All these wimmen run in on him just when they want to, and the children are dead for him. Then he's got peaches and pears and mellyons, an' the best lot of garden sass to be found anywhere. He'll take it powerful kind if we should come over."

Whether it was the thoughts of possible benefits from the garden sass, or from a sisterly inclination to oblige, or from the general kindness of her womanly disposition, we shall not now stop to inquire, but Eliza suffered herself to be convinced, and putting on her broad hat, they were soon on their way to Mr. Snively's humble abode. Upon their way over Mr. Wells felt called upon to while the tedium of the walk by pointing out various spots, whose history had become familiar with him during his many years of residence in that vicinage.

"Whar you see them three stumps, Lizy, thar used to be a big cabin. Three Illinois men lived in it. They all got stuck after the same gal, and each feller thought he was goin' to get her. An' each feller wanted to buy the others out in the cabin."

"An' which won the prize, Jehiel?"

"Prize! I say prize. Wait till I tell yer. Neither one would sell out, so they agreed to play cut-throat euchre for the house the next Sunday."

"I hope the best lookin' man won it, Jehiel."

"But he didn't. Before Sunday come around the gal throwed 'em all and married the most ornery looking Englishman you ever seed. Then they went down to the store and all got on a big drunk an' next day moved under a big tree, sot the old cabin afire and sluiced away the ground it had stood on."

"They should ha' been ashamed of themselves."

"Not much! It paid 'em a heap better than their claim was payin'. I washed three or four pans under the house myself, an' the gravel was just lousy with fine gold."

In such instructive and edifying converse, Mr. Wells occupied the time while making the transit from his own domicile to that of our friend, Snively. The last named gentleman, anticipating no further interruptions for the day had thrown off his coat and boots and with a chair thrown back so that the light came over his shoulders (a practice I recommend to all readers), and his feet planted high on the wall of his house, was perusing (for the fiftieth time) a well thumbed copy of "Pen-knife Sketches." The click of the gate again fell upon his ears, but thinking it was only the children returning with a lingering hope that another melon might be found, he kept his place, and a smothered exclamation of "Drat them brats" was the only token he gave of being disturbed.

But, when in response to some query of the genial Mr. Wells, the voice of the maiden floated out upon the heated air, Mr. Snively felt that he had been taken at a disadvantage. And certainly, the scene of a six-footer getting his hoofs hurriedly down, and into the improvised slippers which a pair of stoggy boots cut off at the ankle furnished, was not one of remarkable beauty. But the gentle Eliza was either too well bred, or too kind of heart to appear to notice his confusion and by the time the pair reached the porch he was entirely at ease.

Mr. Wells performed the ceremony of introduction with commendable ease.

"Bill, this is my sister, Lizy."

"Proud to see you, Miss Lizy, a visitor at my humble abode. Take the rocking cheer."

Eliza graciously accepted the chair which Bill had vacated. "You have a nice little place here, Mr. Snively, quite a gem in this waste of forest and mountain."

"Proud to hear you say so, for I do think it about X. You see I have not lived here fifteen years for nothin'."

"So long as that in one place? Why, I thought you Californy men were all great rovers."

"So we was, until we larned that gadding about didn't pay. But I think I' ll take a little turn now if I can make things come right."

"You contemplate making a visit, I understand?"

"Well, maybe that's it. You see, Miss," continued Bill in an explanatory manner, "I've thort I ort to take a vacation. I've got the bed-rock about cut up, the ditch won't need no cleanin' till fall, and there is no use makin' boxes to lengthen out the flume till we're about ready to use 'em. I ain't been away from here for fifteen years, an' I just want to spludge around a bit."

"Where you goin' an' how long will you be gone?" queried Wells.

"Goin' to see my old pard, Long Jake. He's down in one of the Cow Counties by the Bay. The cuss got married arter he left here an' writes me about his place an' wants me to come down. Maybe I'll get enough of it in two hours an' maybe it'll take a month or two. I thort I'd ax you if you could look out for the place a little."

"Oh, sartin, me an' the young 'uns will do famous. I'll take the cow up with mine an' send Sandy down every day to look after the chickens."

"An' the cat. Must give Tom plenty of milk an' meat, too. I'd feel lost if anything happened to the cat."

"Yes, an' the cat, too. Leave the key with us an' 'Lizy an' the girls will look out for the inside."

To this proposed arrangement Mr. Snively gave an unqualified assent, and soon the group took its departure, leaving that gentleman at liberty to make preparations for the proposed journey.

"Well, I vum!"

Precisely what Mr. Snively meant by this expression is a hard matter for us to determine. In my best judgment formed upon the fact that I have heard church deacons, and others of presumed godliness use the expression, "I swow!" where a common sinner would have said, "I swear!" I am inclined to the opinion that it was a mild form of profanity which our friend indulged in, but that is only an opinion, and it may be an incorrect one. Why Mr. Snively should care to indulge in profanity of any, even of the mildest kind, is utterly incomprehensible to me.

Mr. Snively did not "vum," however, until the retreating forms of his late visitors disappeared from view behind a bunch of chapparal. Then he threw himself into his chair again with the exclamation we have recorded, and it was not many minutes before the pipe was in full blast again while the cat, which had been the object of so much solicitude on his part, had jumped upon his knee and was sending forth a melodious purr. But, for once, the efforts of his prime favorite to attract attention were fruitless. Kitty arched his back and

elevated his tail to an angle of about ninety-four degrees, but Mr. Snively gave only a mechanical stroke or two down Kitty's back and fell to musing again.

Having made use of the phrase "Cow Counties," it is scarcely necessary for me to say that when the various incidents herein so truthfully portrayed were enacted, it must perforce have been anterior to the day when, it was gravely sought in the Legislature of California to add a new section to the Penal Code of the State by which hydraulic mining was declared to be a felony, and he who should thereafter endeavor to earn his bread by turning the nozzle of his pipe against the bank became a fit associate for the thieves and murderers whom the lawyers delight in turning out upon society, to do more pillage and murder. The Golden State had not yet been educated up to the belief that the industry which had advanced the whole Pacific Coast at least a century in the line of progress, was one to be throttled by the very ones who had most profited by it. The "Cow Counties" were the ones to which the steps of those who came here, with at first no intention of remaining after they had robbed the soil of a sufficient portion of its richness, were being turned, to build up homes for permanency, where they and their household gods could repose in the waning years of life. That

part would be all right if they would still cherish a kindly feeling toward the region that had enabled them to fulfill this cherished desire, but, alas, when they became denizens of the valley, too, many of them forgot what they owed to the mountains, and they, too, joined in the hue and cry which said that mining must be stopped.

We left Mr. Snively thoughtfully stroking his cat and ruminating upon the unexpected interview which had just terminated. For, although Mr. Snively was not a *very* impressionable gentleman, we, as a truthful chronicler, will not attempt to deny that a shadow of regret came into his thoughts that he was going away, at all. While not pretending to sound the depths of Mr. Snively's heart, I venture the opinion that if he had known the fact that Eliza had been added to the Wells habitation before he committed himself to the project of a visit to Long Jake, he might have relegated the "Cow Counties" to that oblivion which they *should* be and taken his vacation as he had many times done before, in fishing and killing rattlesnakes on Gopher Creek, only a few miles away. Not that Mr. Snively's case was one of love at first sight, by any means. The image of Lucy Jane, albeit she sometimes left her household duties to assist her Dutch husband in the preparation of the various kinds of "worst" which embellished

the hooks in his shop, had been too firmly planted in his heart to be thus easily dislodged. Even the uncontroverted fact that Lucy Jane had presented the miserable butcher quite a number of pledges of their mutual love was not sufficient to drive that image out, and one of Mr. Snively's enemies (for all good men have enemies) was heard to say that Snively was only waiting for Fritz to kill himself with beer, when the protestations would be renewed. But, inasmuch as Fritz grew fatter and more jolly with the increasing libations of beer, Mr. Snively's friends, while not doubting the sincerity of the passion yet believed to be lingering in his heart of hearts, treated the foul insinuation with the contempt it certainly deserved. Knowing Snively as well as I did (for we had wintered together on Shirt-tail Canyon when flour was two dollars a pound), I had faith in him, and that faith was justified by future events.

Whatever may have been Mr. Snively's thoughts, there was no vacillation in his actions. With the morning's dawn he had prepared his frugal meal, eaten it and was all ready to leave Persimmon City soon as Joe Carver's train came along with an extra mule saddled for his especial behoof. Yet there was one thing undone—leaving the key of his house with old Wells, but as Wells lived on

the road he had to travel that was of but little moment.

"When can I look fer yer back, Bill?" inquired Wells, as he pocketed the key.

"Don't know, mebbe one month, mebbe two. I been cookin' for myself now for goin' on twenty year. If Long Jake's wife knows how to cook p'raps I'll stay till it begins to cloud up."

"Stay long's you please. Lizy an' me an' the kids will look out for things."

By this time Joe Carver was in sight and after a few parting words the two cronies separated.

It is needless for me to say that all of Mr. Snively's injunctions in regard to the cat and the chickens were carried out to the letter. But the melon patch, not being explored with that knowledge drawn from experience, was the bar on which the youthful Wellses were wrecked. It was not until two of them came near being victims to cholera morbus that Eliza, seing the necessity of a discerning mind and restraining hand, took it upon herself to accompany all expeditions to Mr. Snively's domicile and superintended proceedings herself.

It happened to be about the end of a week after Mr. Snively's departure before Aunt Lizy came to this conclusion and accordingly repaired to the Snively habitation with the Wells brood. Her housewifely ideas were hopelessly wounded as the

door was opened and she stepped inside. In the hurried preparations for departure Bill had neither washed the breakfast dishes, swept the floor or made his bed, aside from which the floor was littered with melon seeds, chicken feed and the tails and bones of certain ground squirrels which Thomas had captured and brought into the house, the better to enjoy. To think was to act with Eliza, and it was just no time when the bed was made and cabin swept, by which time water was heated and she was winding up with the breakfast dishes of more than a week before.

All this is very prosaic. Women, since civilization has assumed sway are expected to pass their lives in one continuous round of sweeping, bed-making, cooking and washing dishes. The sphere of "lovely woman" in Free America seems to be to cook and wash dishes. Soon as the dishes used at one meal are cleansed the thrifty housewife must begin preparing something to dirty them again. This, with the other household cares of sweeping, bed-making and attending to the brats constitute the average life of women, and no wonder some of them want to vote. If they can vote the dish pan out of their realm I don't blame them. Why don't they do like *we* did, at one time. The plate used for Monday morning's breakfast would be turned religiously bottom side up and would serve well for

dinner and supper, when it would be ignominiously relegated to the domain of dirty dishes. Tuesday morning a fresh plate would do like duty and so throughout the week, and on Sunday morning, armed with half a flour sack fastened by a nail to the end of a pine stick for a dish rag, and a whole flour sack for a wiping cloth, Bill would tackle the dishes. There were some aristocrats who washed dishes at every meal or at the end of each day, anyhow, but they were the exception and not the rule.

We have said this is all prosaic. So it is, but being facts, in view of what follows hereafter they must be duly chronicled, so we resume at the point of our narrative where Eliza had got at work washing the breakfast dishes. There not being many of them the task was nearly over when the door opened and in stalked Mr. Snively.

"Lawk a mercy! Mr. Snively," screamed the maiden, dropping the plate in hand in her surprise. "Who on airth would have looked for *you* now? I declare to goodness you have nearly scared me out of my wits. Well, well, well!"

"Well, I don't think there was much to be skeered about. But what on arth were you fixin' things up now for?"

"Time enough, you would say, if you had seen how things looked when I came over today for the fust time. A pretty mess the children had made

of this room. That reminds one that they are about somewhere, and the sooner I get them together the better." She opened the door and called: "You children, come. It's time for us to go."

The children, who had divided into bands, one of which was exploring the melon patch in the hope that there might be a half-ripe one left, while the other had begun a vigorous assault on the blackberries, soon came trooping in.

Being thus relieved of any chance for a reflection being cast upon her good name by reason of her enforced company with the solitary Mr. Snively, Eliza felt the duties of hospitality to become paramount, so when rising to take her departure she turned to Bill, "You must be tired, Mr. Snively, and there is nothing cooked in the house. I trust you will come over and take supper with Jehiel and I."

"Thankee, marm; but I'm plumb tired out. I thought I'd find Jim's pack train at the stage house but it had gone over yesterday, so I just took my bundle and walked over, like them fellers they call carpet-baggers down South. I want a rest, and as for supper, I've got some crackers and oysters here that'll fix me out in good style."

At the mention of "oysters" young Simon turned pale as a ghost and the others edged toward the door. These movements were not lost on Eliza,

who, albeit a single female, was better versed in the wiles of the kids than was the guileless Snively. So, as a parting salute, she again extended a welcome to the supper table, and the further assurance that she would "set a plate for him, for she *knew* that when rested he would be fearfully hungry."

"Well, I vum!" growled Bill, as the last of the retreating forms disappeared through the gate. As we have already given a disquisition upon the verb active "vum," we have no space for further remarks except that it be to say that Mr. Snively was only known to "vum" when much excited, or much surprised.

When the Snively cabin was freed from the restraint imposed upon it by the presence of the divine Eliza, its occupant threw himself upon the newly-made bed and was soon in the enjoyment of that restive feeling which comes to the average man after a long and weary tramp. This continued until the darkening shadows admonished him that as he was possessed of a stomach which had taken in no sustenance since he had taken an improvised lunch with China Jim, and had walked eighteen miles since, Mr. Snively realized that a supper of canned oysters taken just before going to bed would probably yield a goodly crop of bad dreams before morning, and wisely determined to have supper at once. A few sticks of wood placed upon the em-

bers of the fire Eliza had utilized for heating the dish-water soon leaped into a flame and with lighted candle he explored his pantry in search of the coveted oysters.

Horror of horrors! not a can of the luscious bivalves could be found. Of the half dozen cans he had left upon the shelf, every one had disappeared.

"It's them dratted Wells boys," said Mr. Snively when the situation dawned upon him. "If I'd a thought old Wells would have no more sense than to send them covies over here to look out for things, he'd never got that key, gol darn him! What in thunder will I do for supper, now?"

As we have already foreseen, there was nothing for the old codger to do except to go over to Wells's and see if that "plate had been kept for him." It had, and although more than an hour had passed since Eliza wended her way homeward, the evening meal was just being put on the table. Perhaps the fact that Eliza knew something of the inner consciousness of man's nature, and therefore caused a couple of spring chickens to be sacrificed had something to do with the delay.

"Just in time, Bill," greeted Jehiel. "We felt sure you'd come. Now sit down and no talk until we get rid of this."

The command was duly obeyed and it was not till a goodly pile of bones lay beside his plate that

Snively felt he had done his whole duty as a man. Although Jehiel's appetite had not been sharpened as Mr. Snively's had, he stood manfully up to the trencher, and it was not until he could store away no more that he gave in. It was quite evident from his actions that a chicken supper had not an every day assurance with him.

"Now, Bill, tell us about your trip. Jake all right?"

"All right as far as a feller full of fever'n ager can be," growled Bill.

"Fever an' ager! An' they've got that where Jake lives, too?"

"Got it everywhere along there. Jake an' his wife, an' her sister all look yaller as brass an' thin as walkin' skeletons. The young ones look better, but still they keep blue mass an' quinine in the house for 'em like they did catnip and squills in our family. Then they have muskeeters all the year round, gnats in their season an' such weather!"

"Then you didn't have a very pleasant time, Mr. Snively. It's a wonder you didn't think of bringing Mrs. Jake's sister to your own delightful climate."

Traces of deep-seated anguish appeared upon Snively's brow. Here, within the ten days past he has stamped the image of Lucy Jane out of his heart, and if he had ever cherished any thoughts of succeeding to the Dutch butcher when that person-

age should go the way of all butchers (Dutch or otherwise), dismissed them from his mind, for her, above all people in the world to intimate the possibility of his bringing in a successor to Lucy Jane, was terrible. He could not trust himself to reply, but cut tobacco in silence. When that job was completed he and Jehiel passed out to the porch, where they solaced themselves to the fullest extent.

As this history only deals with facts, we will state right here that the first sight of the amiable Eliza had done more to drive away any and all day-dreams which Mr. Snively had indulged in regarding Lucy Jane than had all the events of all the years since the Dutch butcher had borne off the prize. Furthermore, his change of thought was intensified by the recollection of the form of Eliza as she appeared to his vision when he came unexpectedly upon her and found her engaged in washing the dishes at his domicile. He felt that washing dishes was an utterly unmanly occupation, a thought which had never before invaded his mind. No wonder that Eliza's query about Long Jake's sister-in-law caused him untold mental agony. Without deigning a reply, he arose and stalked out to the porch, where he and Jehiel soon sought solace in their pipes.

Mr. Snively was too tired to think when he returned to his cabin that night, and throwing him-

self into bed he speedily became oblivious of all mundane affairs. But when he awoke in the morning, saw the cabin as nicely swept as he had ever kept it, looked at the array of clean dishes on the table which Eliza's maiden modesty would not permit her in his solitary presence to remove, and felt how comfortable a night he had passed in the bed made by better skilled hands than he could hope *his* ever to become, he resolved to once more try his chances with womankind. Certain crude ideas that flitted across his brain that it was the duty of every man who could to support a woman, led him to think that it was a sense of duty toward the sex which impelled him onward—but I know better. Men—and women, too,—are selfish. I am getting cynical in my old days, and having been “nipped” a few score, or hundred, of times, begin to question the motives of any one who proposes something to *my* advantage. I begin to look and see where it will be to *his* or *her* advantage, too, and find that the other side would generally get the best end of the bargain.

However, moralizing will not bring the story of Snively's love and wooing to a conclusion. As a preliminary to any overtures he might essay to make, he felt that the inner man must first be appeased. His sour dough was, of course, spoiled; but he could probably get a starter for more from

Doc. Stumple, who, like himself, used that kind of yeast, and looked with scorn upon the "salt emptins" and "hop raisens" which the women folk used. As Mr. Snively had not yet broken his fast, and had nothing to break it on except crackers and coffee, he hied at once in search of what was needed. A box of yeast powders, for present use, some stale meat from the Dutch butcher (who since the camp had gone down only killed twice a week), and some butter sufficed for the morning meal, and Mr. Snively again lighting his pipe began to lay out a plan of siege for the affections of Eliza.

We have elsewhere written that true love, like true merit, is always modest. Hence, it may easily be inferred that Mr. Snively's suit did not prosper to that estimable gentleman's satisfaction. Snively put on his best clothes and walked over to Jehiel's again and again, but always came away with the decisive words unspoken. And it might have been that this history would have remained forever unwritten but for some words dropped by Simon, the youth who had disposed of most of the oysters in Bill's absence; who one evening, after he had taken a second supper with Bill volunteered the information that "Aunt Lizy was goin' away next Monday."

"What for?" asked Snively, almost jumping from his seat in surprise.

"Cos mother's comin' back, an' then Lizy is goin'."

Mr. Snively felt that the moment for action could not be much longer postponed. It was not until the following Sunday, however, that he summed up courage to ask Eliza out to walk. Often was the question on his lips, and as often would the remembrance of the snub he had received from Lucy Jane many years before, come up and crowd it back. It was not until they were on their return that he spoke. They were then passing Bill's own house.

"That's a nice piece of garden land, ain't it, Miss Wells?"

"Very; you ought to raise all the garden sass you need."

"It will raise enough for two, easy. What do you think of that house?"

"'Tain't much," said Eliza scornfully. "I guess it will do well enough for you though."

"But if I tore down the woodshed and put on an addition of three or four rooms, would it be big enough for two?"

"I think it would," said Eliza, demurely.

"An' oh, 'Liza, *will* you be one of the two?"

There are some situations too sacred to be intruded upon. What reply was made by Eliza can only be inferred. The loving couple hooked arms

and proceeded in silence to the Wells residence. But Bill was too bashful to go in and they parted on the porch. Before the retreating form of Bill passed out of the gate young Simon was in at the back door.

"Oh, pop, what do you think I seed. Old Bill Snively a kissing our Lizy out on the porch."

"What's this, Lizy?" asked Jehiel, of that lady, who just then entered. "Can't you and Bill Snively part without a farewell kiss?"

"He's got a right *now* to kiss me, sir," said Eliza.

"Bully for you, Lizy; that little yarn I made up an' got Simon to tell him about your goin' away brought him to taw. An' it needed somethin' of that kind to do it."

THE STORY HE TOLD THE PROSPECTORS

"What I'm going to tell you fellers, now," said Smith to a couple of quartz prospectors, who had stopped at his cabin for several days while tracing up some "float," "happened more'n thirty years ago. I was pretty hostile about it at the time and felt like punching Ned Thompson's head, but I soon got over it an' made up my mind that it had turned out the best for me. And " (here he looked dolefully at the furnishings of his cabin), "the longer I live the more I think so.

"Ned Thompson went away from these parts to one of the cow counties eighteen years ago. Thar was five young uns then, and I've heard there's five more since then. What I could have done with such a lot after the claim on Coon Point petered out on us, as the lawyers say, 'deponent sayeth not.' I hadn't thought of it for years, but there's so much in the newspapers now about the 'new woman,' what she will do and how she will do it, that I kinder got to thinking how one of the old style of women did once, and so I'll have to unburden my mind and tell it.

“As I told, or rather hinted, I was minin’ at the time on Coon Point. Jo Lyons was my pard, and a mighty good pard he was, too. I’d go into a claim with him tomorrow, if he was here, but Jo passed in his checks ten years ago, an’ I trust an’ believe, he is in that city with golden streets, where there’s no need of minin’. We had two claims—Jo represented us in one, I in the the other. The claims were about two miles apart, so it sometimes happened that Jo an’ I didn’t see each other for a fortnight or three weeks at a time. Don’t get tired, because I am so long-winded—I want you to understand the thing as it went along. Sometimes Jo would come up, then sometimes I’d go down, but generally we would come together Sunday at Gleason’s store near the forks below here. There’s no store at The Forks now—the last proprietor gave too much credit an’ busted out, but in those days there was quite a settlement at The Forks. There was a store an’ blacksmith, an’ butcher shop, an’ a sort of hotel, where you could get bacon and beans twenty-one times a week, an’ other fixin’s. A feller named McLeman kept the hotel. I don’t know as he was the laziest man I ever saw, but I think he was, an’ it was a fact that in them days that when some lazy coot had a wife he’d quit minin’ an’ keep a hotel. Then the woman would do the cookin’ and he’d tend bar (for there had to

be a bar), an' what money they made he'd gen'rally lost at poker or loo, for there was always a card-sharp boardin' at the hotel, waitin' to catch the landlord. McLeman had married a widow and she had a gal about fifteen years old. Well, one Sunday afternoon I was home. Had been down to the store, heard that Jo had been down sometime in the week an' got a lot of grub packed to his house. I knew then there was no division of dust from the claim Jo was working and only wondered why he had not waited until I come, to see if I had any for him. But we were pards, and I tell you, boys, pards had to trust, and did trust, each other in those days. Sometimes pards would be men that never seed each other till they got working a piece of ground together, but they trusted each other, and was gen'rally right, though there were some fellers what would steal from themselves, doggone 'em! Well, it was pretty near night when here comes Jo. He had his hair cut and was rigged out in a bran-new suit of store clothes, and I hardly knew him. He sot down an' we talked about the diggin's for a while, an' then about a lawsuit some of the boys were going to have about water, an' then I couldn't think of anything else, an' Jo didn't, either, so we sot thar and smoked. Then all at once he breaks out like a volcano.

"Sam," he says. "I want you to be on hand, Wednesday."

"On hand for what?" says I.

"I want you to be my best man, then."

"All right, Jo," says I, "we've stood in together more'n once, an' I'll be with you agin. I'll ile up my pistol, an' we'll stan' 'em off."

"Sho," he says, "you don't need any pistol. Thar ain't any fighting to be did, as I know of."

"Then, Jo, I'm off my nut a little, I guess. Don't you mean that you want me to stick by you in some trouble, same as you did by me an' Posey when we had that row with the North Carolina crowd?"

"Not a bit, Sam. I always knew you was a good friend, and I want you to be my best man when I get married."

"It took my breath away to hear him talk. At last I says: 'You get married? Git!'

"There's no git about it," says Jo.

"None of your April-fool tricks at this time of the year, Jo, if you please. They're out of season!" For Jo had played me a consarned sharp one the year before, and I had felt a little sore over it.

"It's nothing of the kind, Sam," he persisted. "I am goin' to get married and need your help a bit."

"Well, Jo," says I, "I am bound to b'lieve you. Now who is the happy lady?"

"I don't know yet how happy she'll be, but it's Susan."

"Susan!" says I, jumping up. "You're mor'n twice as old."

"That's so. She's fifteen an' I'm thirty-five. That's mor'n twice, but when she's thirty I'll be fifty, a good deal less than twice. An' if we live till she's sixty I'll be eighty. She'll then be three-quarters as old as I."

"Good arithmetic, Jo," says I. "Have you figured out how long it will be till she gets to be the oldest?"

"Naw!" says Jo, "no call for that. But will you stand in with me?"

"Sartin, Jo, sartin. But I'm chock full of curiosity to know how you ever spunked up courage enough to ax a young gal like Susan to marry you."

"Sam, the fact is she axed me."

"Axed you?"

"That's what she did. Here's her letter to me." An' Jo took it out of his vest pocket an' handed me. "Stop a minit, an' I'll read it to you. Maybe you boys will wonder why I got this letter an' kept it, but you'll larn afore I git through." And Mr. Smith opened an old desk and produced a faded

letter which he read to the prospectors. It ran this way:

Do not think strangely of me at what I am writing. My stepfather makes my home so uncomfortable for me that I want a home, shared only with one who will love me. You can build up such a home, which will be a paradise on earth to me. It is leap year, or I would not dare address you as I do.

If you consider my proposal favorably, consider yourself invited to be my partner at the Leap Year ball, at Logtown. Of course, I cannot come to take you there, but if you will have a rig at our house a little before dark, I will leave, never, never to return. If you cannot come yourself, send some one you can trust and we will meet at Logtown, when my happiness, and, I trust, yours will be assured.

SUSAN.

"That's pretty straightfor'ard, Jo," says I. "Now what do you want me to do?"

"Well, I'll tell you, Sam. I've got a couple of hosses, an' Watkin has promised me his wife's side-saddle. I want you to git the gal and take her to Dogtown. I'll be thar and have the Squire right on hand quick as you git thar. Then, I suppose she'll have some fool notions about havin' somebody to 'stand up' with us; if she does you'll be the feller. Then we'll all go to the Leap Year ball. I want it all over quick, 'cause if old Mc got it into his head he'd shoot. I wouldn't mind that much, only I don't want any shootin' in the family."

"Of course I agreed to go, and at sundown I hitched the hosses to a couple of trees and went to Old Mc's place. They had just done supper, ex-

cept one or two fellers of that kind that is always behind.

"Old Mc was as full as a tick that had been on a dog's neck for a month. I know the old codger fust rate; many were the games of euchre I played with him for the drinks. When Susan saw me she said somethin' to her mother an' went off. It didn't take a gal three hours to dress in them days, and pretty soon she came back all rigged to go, with some of her duds in a little satchel. Old Mc had been tryin' to get me to play euchre, but, of course, I didn't bite an' as quick as I got away from him I followed Susan. As luck would have it the old scoundrel followed me an' just as I was opening the side door to go out, in he came.

"What's this, Suke?" (You see, in those days we didn't have any Susies, or Mamies, or Netties, or any of that kind of names the gals all have nowadays. What is now Lizzie was called Poll or Polly. Mary was Moll and Susan was Suke. If you wanted to and was on good terms enough you could call 'em Sukey or Molly, spelt with a y, too, all the time, too, and don't you forget it.)

"Whar you goin' in that rig, at this time of night?"

"I've asked this gentleman to be my partner to the Leap Year ball."

"Well, this gentleman can go to the Leap Year ball without your escort, or not at all. A fine thing for a gal of your age goin' to a ball, without your mother is with you. We had enough of that when you went to Grimshaw's dance with that bullet-headed Thompson. Go an' get them traps off an' help your mother with her work."

"But, pap, I asked this gentleman to go, like all the other gals are doin' and I hate to disappoint him. Didn't I?" turning to me.

"In strict truth she had not, but it would not do to contradict, so I answered and lied like a gentleman should. 'Yes, sir; I am here in consequence of this lady's invitation.'

"Then you can get out of here on my invitation. There's the door; mosey along."

"I moseyed. It was not a very graceful thing to do, but the old fellow had the say on me. As I stepped out of the side door and slammed it after me, Susan slipped out through the barroom and got a chance to whisper to me to 'wait for her awhile at the forked spruce.' Just then Old Mc came out and she said loud enough to be heard forty feet: 'Good night, Mr. Lyons; sorry to have to disappoint you.'

"I took leave of Susan as if I wouldn't see her for the next ten year. I untied my horse and rode down the creek a ways till I was out of sight, then



"Then you can get out of here on my invitation. There's the door; mosey along." (See page 296.)

took a trail I knew and was soon at the forked spruce. An' I hadn't been there ten minutes when she came.

"Did you have any trouble after I left?" I asked her.

"Not a bit. He went in an' took another drink an' sat down in the chair and was snoozin' in no time. Now, if you please, we'll mount an' be off."

"We mounted an' we clattered away to Logtown in short order. When we got in town the hotel was all lit up. I handed her into the parlor an' told her I would hurry up Jo an' the Squire.

"Jo was on watch, however, an' I met them right outside. We went into the sittin' room where Susan was alone, all the rest having gone to the hall, upstairs, Jo shook hands with her an' introduced the Squire.

"I suppose we might as well get through with the business at once," said Jo. "Do you want one of your lady friends to be present?" but she shook her head.

"Please take hold of your right hands," said the Squire. Jo reached for Susan's, but she jerked it away.

"What's the matter now?" says Jo, in a huff.

"Arter we're here 'cordin' to agreement, are you goin' to back out?"

"You ain't the man!" says Susan.

"I ain't the man! then who the dickens is?"

"She pointed to me. You bet Jo was on the war-path when she did that. 'I'll settle this with you tomorrow or right now, if you say so,' says Jo, 'but I didn't think it of you, Sam; I trusted you in this matter, an' never thought you would take the girl away from me for yourself.'

"No more I didn't, Jo."

"That I can answer for," said Susan, "we never talked a word about it. We was in too big a hurry to get here."

"Ya'as," says Jo. "Of course you will lie for each other. Maybe you will deny havin' writ this." An' Jo pulls out the letter.

"I writ it fast enough, but you see I sent it to Mr. Lyons."

"An' who the dickens am I if not Mr. Lyons?"

"Oh, I see, I made a sad mistake. I wouldn't a had this happen for the world. I thought this was Mr. Lyons."

"If that's the case I've nothing more to say. Sam, if this letter was intended for you, you take an' keep it. But I don't believe it, not much," An' Jo bolted for the door.

"Well, here was a pretty fix for me. Come to be the 'best man' an' if there was a best man needed I would be the chap that would want him. I didn't know what to do or say, so I sot there like

a knot on a log an' waited for things to take their own course.

"Pretty soon they began to do it. 'I am very much grieved that this matter has turned out the way it has, Mr. Smith, but I really did think you were Mr. Lyons.'

"Why, how in the world did you get that notion?"

"Why, you an' he et dinner one Sunday at our house an' I asked pap who you two were. An' he told me you were pards and had good claims up the Gulch, a couple of miles, an' then told me your names. An' I asked him which was which an' he told me, but either he or I got the names mixed—I disremember now how it was. An' you know I never was introduced to you, though we always spoke."

"I remember, an' I remember you called me Lyons onct last night. But I thought it was only a mistake, 'cos you was thinkin' of him."

"I felt orful awkid, I can tell you, but the gal had a deal more sense than I, an' after we sot there a few minutes she says to me, 'Now go an' git ready, for you know I have to take you to the dance. You'll be fined if you go in alone. We'll talk the other matter over tomorrow.'

"Well, it's 'kinder onexpected,' as you ladies are always said to say, but won't Old Mc be after you tomorrow?"

"Not he; I know him too well. He'll be after another jag, an' if he did come here he dasn't bother me. Now get ready, for I hear the fiddles goin'."

"It didn't take me long to get ready, an' I was back in five minits. The Squire was gone an' Susan was there alone. She took my arm, and as we started upstairs she stopped me a little an' said. 'This thing has turned out so different from what I cal'lated that I'm all upsot and feel narvy. We'll dance the first chance we get an' then I'll go an' rest for I'm plumb gin out. I'll speak to Bet Hally to take you to supper, if I ain't there.'

"I couldn't say anything agin this, it seemed so reasonable. When we got to the door of the room where the dancing was going on there was a vinegar-faced woman taking tickets. I was getting out my purse to pay, but Susan stopped me. 'No, sir; this is Leap Year an' we are goin' to claim all the privileges an' take the responsibilities.' She paid for the ticket like a little man an' in we went an' jined in a cotillion, what they call 'quadrills' nowadays. Then she led me to a seat, had a talk with Bet, excused herself to me an' put out.

"I never was much of a hand to dance; my eddication in that line had been awfully neglected. So, after Susan went I was content to be a male-wall-flower until supper time. I just sot ther and thunk. Bet came an' took me into supper, an' you bet I didn't throw off on that. Then I went down to Tobe Luney's place an' turned in.

"I didn't sleep—not much. I kept thinkin' an' couldn't sleep. Gals were powerful scarce in that part of Californy, an' though I had never thought about gettin' married before, yet if Susan wanted me, I was as willin' as that feller Barkis was, as I onct read about in a book. I had mor'n two thousand in dust salted down, an' both claims were payin'. I just made up my mind that if as pretty a gal as Susan was, wanted to get with me I'd marry her, sure. Then I went to sleep.

"I slept till pretty late in the mornin', though I gen'rally am a powerful early riser. Toby had et breakfast an' gone, so I pikes over to the hotel where I had left my ducky the night before. The landlord told me she was just eatin' breakfast an' when I went to jine her there she sat alongside of that miserable Thompson. Well, I didn't have much appetite, so when they got through, I was, too, an' follered 'em into the settin' room.

"Thompson went out an' left us thar. I didn't

know exactly how to begin, so I says: 'Hope you feel rested this mornin', Miss Bradley.'

"Toluble," she says.

"About what we was to talk of—"

"Oh, Mr. Smith," she says. "I hope you don't consider what I said last night anyways bindin' on you."

"And why not?" says I.

"Cos I didn't, an' got married last night."

"Hee, hee, hee!" says the tall prospector. "That young fellow had his license aforehand and was all ready."

"License be ——. We warn't civilized enough then to get licenses, or have many divorces. No, sir-ee. Git your gal if she was willin' afore the Squire, an' you was all right. The Squire didn't stop to ask you many questions if he thought the fee would be all right, but I tell you it kinder took me down."

"Do you mean to say, Susan, that you've been playin' Jo an' me both to have us get you here for that Thompson?"

"That's about it. You know I told you last night that this was Leap Year an' we were goin' to take all the privileges. I think I've took about all. Don't you?"

"I felt so doggone mad that I left her without

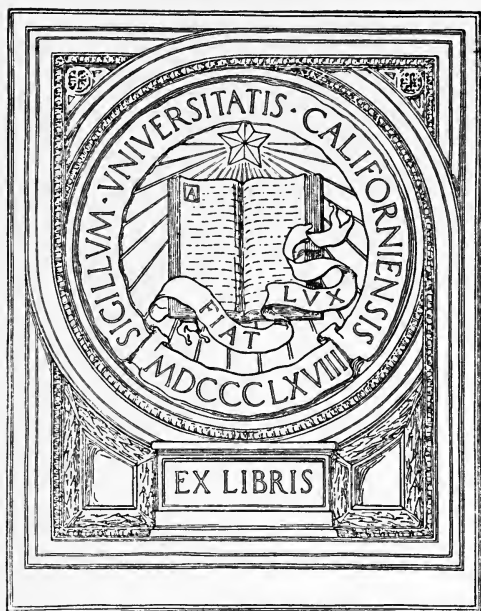
saying good-bye, got my two hosses an' streaked for home.

"Jo an' I got good friends again quick as I told him we were in the same boat. Misery loves company, you know. We didn't either have much luck after that venture. Coon Point gin out all of a sudden an' we got into a lawsuit about water for the upper claim, an' we had to sell the water to pay the lawyers. I'm pikin' around here now, havin' et up my two thousand dollars, an' when I think of poor Thompson an' the ten children that might have been mine, I feel tolable glad that Susan didn't carry out any such match with me.

"I never seed the gal but onct afterwards. Thompson an' her went up to Hawk Holler, an' lived like two turtle doves. Old Mc was goin' to break my head for the share I took in it for a long time an' bein' a peaceable man, I kept out of his way. Fin'ly we got together an' I told how the gal played Jo an' I, an' it tickled him so that he insisted on settin' up the drinks—me to pay for 'em—at onct. So I got to goin' there again, an' playin' euchre as before. An' one day when I was there, Susan came, brought with her one of the prettiest gal babies I ever saw, an' they made it all up. I felt kinder sheepish, but she watched her chance an' said to me: 'You really must forgive

me, Mr. Smith, but I was awfully put on here, an' that was the only way I could see out of it.' Of course she was furguv, but when I hear an' read about the new woman, I wonder if she'll play a feller any better nor that young old un did, mor'n thirty years ago.

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